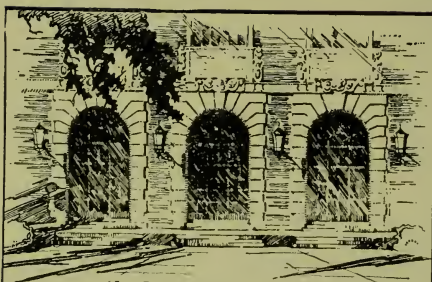


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# A MASQUERADER

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF

'A MOORLAND IDYL,' 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# A MASQUERADER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MOUNTAIN WINE.

‘THIS is glorious, Mignonne,—sad, contemplative, sympathetic, and all the rest of it. The spot appeals to me more forcibly than any other in the universe. Why not settle down here once and for all, and turn philosophers? You often speak of the delights of that kind of thing, but never make an effort to carry out your theories. Let us begin to-morrow.’

The young lady was standing by one of the open windows, with a wide scallop garden-hat shading her features, and she turned to her companion as she spoke.

‘Here surely is a fitting scene for your *vie primitive*,’ she continued. ‘Is it far enough removed from all distracting elements of *la vie factice*? Is it, ma Mignonne?’

‘Probably,’ was the reply.

‘I will stop all the papers; countermand all superfluous orders——’

‘Especially your own personal ones at Liberty’s.’

‘Certainly, I was thinking of them especially. I will get in a stock of charity remnants; of works on agriculture; of farm implements. We will read Thoreau aloud for three hours a day.’

Mrs. Monk laughed outright.

‘Is it in the way of practical agriculture then, Clare, that this spot appeals to you more forcibly than all others?’ she asked, derisively. ‘Thoreau, remember, had other soil than peat moss upon which to raise his substance. I fear he would have died of consumption earlier than he actually did if he had selected our Cheviot morasses as a centre for his philosophical experiments. I must say that I myself feel most unpractical under the spell of that Muckle Moss and the Dour Craggs: very far certainly from farm implements even of the most primitive nature.’

‘So do I,’ said Clare, regarding more soberly the prospect before her. ‘But I thought they were an essential part of your philosophical retirement. I shan’t be sorry if I am mistaken. I prefer the intellectual abstractions, by all means.’

‘You are a flippant child, Clare. You know that I have never thought of a permanent retirement. Such a course would, in a frivolous nature like mine, defeat wholly the desired end. I am well equipped with the housewifely virtues, am I not? Bah! I only enjoy these scenes because of their not being vulgarized into the background of a “daily life.” Fancy me *attached*! I hate a daily life; it is the destruction of all artistic perceptions, and I am so constituted that I can only get enjoyment out of such ideal perceptions. Accept dreams for what they are, my dear, and they may be a joy to you for ever; but try to put them into practical effect, and they very quickly turn themselves into vanity and vexation of spirit.’

‘I suppose it is so,’ remarked Clare, in a tone of discontent.



‘Nothing truer. It is flagrantly so in the matter of a pastoral existence. Turn housekeeper and see. Revel in your store-room ; all the delights of preparing those exquisite conserves, of turning and polishing the apples, and so forth. Purify your spirit in the dairy. I *have* heard women use profane language over butter-making. Blasphemy, you think. You wouldn’t, of course ; but be satisfied with looking on. Only as an unattached observer can you hope to reap the smallest spiritual satisfaction from it. Become involved as an actor in the beautiful simplicities of Arcadia, and you would fly to the slums of Houndsditch as a preferable shelter.’

‘You get more and more cynical, Mignonne. I cannot share your feelings in all this.’

‘Of course you can’t, dear girl. Chil-

dren are blessed with an omnipotent imagination. The artistic soul of things is to them the reality. It is only towards five-and-thirty that seams begin to appear. Not that they need harass you. In my case, they only make life go the easier; but all are not blessed by the stars as I have been. I have been spared the burden of taking life seriously at any time.'

'It is a dreadful admission, aunt.'

'It is to you who are by nature sentimental; but it saves one a great deal of vexation, I can assure you. A moral constitution imposes no end of useless torment upon its victim. Yet have I a very vicious temperament?'

'A little flippancy,' said Clare, in a tone of piquant gravity: 'coupled with an instability of——'

The young lady burst into ringing

laughter as a cushion from the couch hit her in the centre of the back. She quickly seized it from the floor and flung it at the head of her antagonist, almost at the same instant snatching up a fancy screen to serve as a shield in the combat. But her aunt only replaced the cushion behind her.

‘Not of aim, you mischief,’ she remarked, as she was doing so. ‘But let us keep to the point, Clare. If you are wishful to rusticate, I am quite willing to humour you ; provided you will submit to the ordeal for an unbroken period of six months.’

‘Without papers and library books?’

‘No, you may have them for this first trial. But you must submit to the social life of the district. Be at home to visitors ; gracious to Mrs. Whinstone ; poetical to the vicar.’

‘Oh, yes ; there is no great difficulty in all that. I rather like poor old Mrs. Whinstone, and the vicar I adore, or rather he adores me. There is nothing terrible before me, I can assure you. But you !’ ejaculated Clare, in a tone of real pity, at the same time advancing towards the couch upon which the elder lady was reclining. ‘How will you survive six months of such existence?’

‘Have no fear for me,’ laughed the other, taking the hand which was affectionately laid upon her shoulder. ‘Besides, I don’t rigidly bind myself to the condition. It is only you that are bound. When I am jailer, I shall set myself to study the native temperament of these climes.’

Clare looked into the eyes of Mrs. Monk, perhaps with something more than

a mere playful earnestness. Certainly the arch gaze became her well; pose and expression were alike beautiful.

‘There is something,’ she said, sententiously. ‘Even you are not habitually so erratic. No preparation, no sufficient reason. Just when you are due at the Salon, too. Ostensibly for a week, and now you calmly plan for half a year. You are not hiding any indisposition from me? Tell me that at least, *ma Mignonne*. In that direction you are not entitled to secrets.’

‘You overrate my heroic qualifications, dear child,’ replied the lady, in obvious enjoyment of the other’s tender solicitude. ‘You know too well that you get shameless notice of my physical infirmities. Surely you have ceased to look for logical explanation of any step of mine? I

wanted to hear a Cheviot curlew, so I came.'

'Really, aunt?'

'Really, Clare. Do you think I am turning dissembler in my old age?'

Clare smiled her satisfaction, and returned to the window to look again at the prospect which quite seriously exercised some kind of fascination over her.

It was but the day before that they had reached the Peel, as Mrs. Monk's Northumberland residence was called : a visit to Paris having been, with singular precipitancy, overthrown in favour of this northward journey. But Mrs. Monk affected a wide measure of Bohemian caprice, and this sufficiently explained the movements in which the imaginative Clare saw good to find matter for more recondite speculation.

Miss Langtoft had never known her own parents, this aunt of hers having fulfilled all relationships from the child's earliest recollection. The young lady was now about twenty-one, so that, for some time past, the intercourse between herself and her aunt had developed into an equal companionship, a species of easy familiarity, having in some respects marked advantages over the closer bond of mother and child. A liberal independence in pecuniary affairs, coupled with a system of indulgent discipline on the part of Mrs. Monk, and a healthy physical constitution on the part of the girl, had caused Clare's life hitherto to run in a very smooth and pleasant channel. A less robust temperament might not have developed so satisfactory a result out of a regimen of such unconventional laxity. In Clare's case,

however, the informal home-training had undoubtedly added a charm to a personality by nature remarkably graceful. Her instincts seemed infallibly refined and womanly, although there was very much about her to horrify the older-fashioned of her sex.

Mrs. Monk's claim to an artistic temperament was not wholly based on pedantry, even if it had not a foundation of any remarkable depth. At any rate, her æsthetic propensities were more than a mere fashionable acquiescence, and it was possibly true, as the lady herself with some regret averred, that if the first twenty years of her life had been differently directed, her artistic instincts need not have been dissipated in mere dilettantism. As it was, her habit of thought and attitude to the general world savoured



more of the professional than the lay; but, since her attainment to womanhood, worldly affluence, combined with an insatiable craving for cosmopolitan experiences and exceptional opportunities of indulging it, had effectually sapped all that moral energy which is indispensable to the essential toil preliminary to any kind of imaginative productiveness.

This tendency in the aunt had, of course, exercised considerable influence over Clare's early life and development, and had been the means of imparting to her a more intellectual form of culture than necessarily results from early material well-being. The girl had no claim to a faculty for study of any kind, therefore she was but little of a scholar; but with anything of an imaginative nature she had always displayed a peculiar affin-

ity. She was, consequently, in a high degree accomplished, without the remotest suggestion of being overburdened by her gifts. Not one of them had overpowered her: they were all subdued to her own sparkling vitality, appropriated by sheer force of the irresistible alchemy of exuberant animal spirits. It was true that she had in some degree cultivated a certain natural facility she had in handling the pencil, but, beyond a little exceptional boldness in the choice of her subjects, her productions were only such as might have been claimed by hundreds of the cultivated young ladies of our own day.

To such a temperament a raid from the civilised world into the romantic wilds of the border naturally offered, at all times, peculiar attractions; and the attractions were this morning presented in all the

glow of a renewed impression, as well as the exhilarating sunshine of early June.

‘Come and hear one, then, aunt,’ said Clare, after a moment’s silence.

‘My dear, I heard them through my bed-room window this morning, whilst you, I’ll be bound, were fast asleep.’

‘That’s very likely. I sha’n’t sleep in that west bed-room again. It is ridiculous not to be awakened by the morning sun when you are in the country! What is the good of coming? You may sleep until mid-day.’

‘I’ll try it, Clare. I am not troubled with oversleep. I am tired with the journey, and shall not go out before lunch.’

‘Then adieu, Mignonne,’ said Clare. ‘I must climb down and see the water. The first glimpse of that mountain wine

is more exhilarating than all the sparkling vintages of the south.'

'Be off, then. You are a born moss-trooper, despite all attempts to civilise you.'

Therewith, Clare leaped lightly from the open window, and stood upon the gravel terrace outside. For a moment she looked around her, inhaling the fragrant breeze—fragrant not only with the wide-spread fragrance of the heath, pine, and bog-myrtle from the adjacent moorlands, but also with the apricot-breath from a hedge of gorse bordering the parterre just before her, now, in its bloom, a solid mound of blazing gold.

Invigorated by the draught, the young lady walked briskly to a wicket gateway at the extremity of the gorse, humming some ditty the while, and passed into the

field beyond. This was a sloping piece of pasture-ground, rising to a point immediately behind the house, and crowned by the scanty, but picturesque ruins of a border peel or fortress, on account of which the modern residence had received its name.

The sheep started at Clare's approach, but were quickly convinced of her innocent intentions. After the first simultaneous gaze from the white, upturned faces, one after the other lowered its head and returned fearlessly to its nibbling.

The intruder passed on, ascending the green slope before her. In a few minutes she was at the top, standing with one hand upon a ruined wall, to survey the extensive prospect. In her other hand she held a little bunch of yellow, moun-

tain pansies, which she had picked up on the way.

She was but little higher than the chimneys of her aunt's house, which stood just at her feet. Then there was the handful of houses constituting the village of High Feldom, the last village in the dale; only leagues of sombre wilds beyond it. Directly opposite to her rose a sweep of moorland with the Dour Craggs at the top, —great black blocks of basalt standing out against the sky, like rude, massive fortifications of the old world. The slope of heather lay between two large pine-woods, known respectively as the east and west plantation, their black depths contrasting finely with the cloudless blue space of the present moment.

Immediately behind Clare the ground was almost precipitous, the grassy slope

descending abruptly to a noisy, stony river which made a curve round the foot of the castle hill. Large rocks were seen in its bed, and on the far bank a strip of woodland touching the water's edge. This bend was Clare's favourite peep, and the ceaseless brawling of the water a sound of which she was very fond. She was never at the Peel many hours before descending to the stream. The spirit of the scene touched some of the deeper chords within her, chords which in her ordinary life but seldom found their note. Here too were sheep, and, like one of them, Clare fearlessly descended. After a scramble which she enjoyed, but which was not entirely without danger, the river-bank was reached, and the young lady sat upon a block of stone to rest.

‘Imprisonment to stay six months here!’ she thought, in her youthful enthusiasm, with her eyes fixed upon the brown sunlit water in which she vaguely saw the trout darting to and fro like living shadows. ‘I believe I am not so worldly as I sometimes think. I am sure I could live here very happily a primitive existence—not alone, perhaps, but with a—a conceivable kind of companion. You shall see, *ma tante*,—I shall not tire first.’

Then with the thought of Mrs. Monk there was a temporary divergence of the mental current; but with the majestic flight of a heron, which was going to alight at a short distance from where she sat, her mind reverted to the natural objects around her, and she abandoned herself to the pure enjoyment of the enchanting solitude.



Absolute solitude, as Clare herself imagined, and, as a general rule, would undoubtedly have been the case; but it chanced that this bend in the river, with its deep pools and shady corners amongst the rocks, was an especially favourite resort for trout, and, as Mrs. Monk was known to be an exceptionally lax and good-natured proprietor, an enthusiastic angler would occasionally trespass upon her well-stocked preserves. Such was the case this morning, and, before Clare had been seated for a quarter-of-an-hour, she was disturbed in her meditations by the apparition of such a trespasser upon the opposite side of the water.

He was well equipped with all necessary appliances, and, when he saw that the young lady's eye had detected him, he plunged straightway into the water in his

thigh-deep boots and came out radiant before her.

As a matter of fact, the gentleman had seen Clare since she first descended to the water, but, as he had been hidden in an alder-bush upon the opposite bank, some yards farther down the river, he had escaped her observation. It was not with any ill-bred intention that he had continued in concealment. He had lingered there—watching Clare through his opera-glasses, certainly—in a genuine state of indecision whether at this moment to accost her or not. We see how he had decided. He had crept some distance under shelter of the bushes, and made his appearance as though the occurrence were an accident.

‘Good-morning, Miss Langtoft,’ he began, with the accent and bearing of a

gentleman. 'I am not superstitious, but you quite startled me. It is delightful to see you here again. I beg you to pardon my intrusion.'

'We came quite unexpectedly; only arrived last night. I hope Mrs. Whinstone is well?'

'Pretty well for her, thank you. And Mrs. Monk?'

'Very well, thank you.'

'I must ask you to give her my apology for trespassing on her domains, and I hope I may take the liberty of sending the result of my sport for her acceptance.'

'She will be only too glad that you have been acting upon her request, Mr. Whinstone. I can also answer for her gladly accepting a share of the spoil. Have you had good sport?'

‘Fairly good;’ he opened his creel for Clare’s inspection.

‘Oh, very good, I should think. I came down for a more peaceful purpose,’ she added, smiling.

‘Of course; but you don’t go so far as my good mother, do you, to condemn all sport as savage and demoralizing?’

‘Well, no; hardly that. I am not a vegetarian, and in the face of that I cannot offer objection to my dinner being procured in, at any rate, a picturesque manner.’

‘Capital, Miss Langtoft, upon my word!’ exclaimed the young gentleman, laughing heartily. ‘That is the best argument in our support that I have ever heard stated. But you will forgive my disturbing you,’ he continued, preparing to go. ‘My mother will hope to have the pleasure of

seeing something of you, I know. Do you stay long?’

‘It is wholly uncertain; but long enough, I hope, to renew my delightful discussions with Mrs. Whinstone.’

‘I hope so, too. We all wish there were greater attractions in this poor country of ours to keep you longer amongst us.’

‘You underrate your country,’ replied Clare. ‘It is we that are at fault in not being satisfied with the pure attractions that it offers. I could live here with pleasure, I’m sure.’

‘I am so glad you feel that,’ exclaimed Whinstone, ingenuously. ‘I am awfully fond of the place, and am always glad to get back even from town. But of course you will find intellectual interests in the district which I am incapable of perceiving. The vicar has tried to take me in

hand on our fishing-expeditions, but to no purpose, I'm afraid.'

'He always said you were hopeless,' remarked Clare, laughing.

'You evidently agree with him,' said the young man, obviously delighted. 'Well, I hope we may pursue the discussion at some other time. Good-bye.'

He went on down the river's bank, leaving Clare seated upon her stone, and very soon he was hidden by the bushes. The young lady had never been conscious of any partiality for Mr. Paul Whinstone, he belonging to a type of character for which she could summon up but scant sympathy: nevertheless, she perceived improvement in him this time, and was not aware of positive antipathy. In the face of the actual objects around her he was not long in her mind, and as soon as

he had disappeared Clare was picking a way along the rocks in the opposite direction, revelling in the natural beauties as joyfully and with as much freedom from the cares of a practical world, as if she had been twenty years younger. Her step would frighten a dipper from its nest, and she would rejoice in the shrill cry of the lonely bird as it flew up the river-bed to a distant stone. Then the plaintive notes of the sandpipers would come to her on the babbling of the water from the shingle beyond the alder-trees. The cool fragrance of the moss, the ferns, and of the general foliage imperceptibly exhilarated her. The withered pansies were hidden in her hand amongst larger and later acquisitions. A sprig of broom she would pluck from the bush hanging from a cleft in the rock; a dainty saxi-

frage from amongst the moss ; or a stem of the large blue geranium from the rank herbage underneath the trees. Here on this slab of stone, round which the water swept in such a deep smooth wave, Clare must needs kneel down and plunge her hand with the flower-stalks into the fascinating current.

Thus employed, an hour soon passed, and, before Clare had returned to the house, Mrs. Monk had left her couch to take a survey of the garden. This lady felt, no doubt, the peculiar charm of her moorland residence, but was free from the sentimental enthusiasm prominent in her niece. She was very nearly double Clare's age, but succeeded in preserving a remarkably youthful appearance, having apparently so far escaped the usual undesirable attributes of approaching middle age. Her



complexion retained very much of its original freshness, whilst her figure, in its mature development, showed no want of graceful proportion and muscular flexibility. This, as set off by the perfection of millinery, was especially noticeable, whilst the lady now walked, or rather slowly and silently glided, along the pathway by the gorgeous tulip-border with her eyes apparently on the flowers.

Not many minutes had she been there when a footstep behind the trees attracted her attention. Supposing it to be that of her own gardener, Mrs. Monk walked in that direction, and, upon emerging from the shrubbery, found that she was mistaken.

‘ Oh, is it you, Hugh ?’

‘ Mr. Paul asked me to leave some trout, ma’am, for your acceptance.’

‘It is very kind of him. Thank you very much. Are they all well at the Hall?’

‘About as usual, ma’am, I think.’

Hugh was not in the least disconcerted by the lady’s critical examination of him. He stood in a natural, unconstrained attitude, with the basket of trout in one hand and his plain staff in the other; offering a fairly handsome, well-tanned countenance without fear to her scrutiny.

‘And your sister well?’ she said, turning away again.

‘Quite well, thank you, ma’am.’

Mrs. Monk walked on, and Hugh went up to the house.

A few minutes later, when the young man was returning, the lady again issued from the shrubs.

‘I forgot to tell you, Hugh, that we have brought a few books for you, if you will accept them. They are not unpacked yet, though. Perhaps you will call when you are this way again.’

‘I am very much obliged to you, ma’am,’ said Hugh, warmly. ‘I hope Miss Langtoft is very well?’

‘Quite, thank you. Good-bye.’

Scarcely had Mrs. Monk turned away, before another voice was heard exclaiming,

‘Why, Luath, is that you, old boy? Is your master here?’

Clare immediately entered by the front gate, and walked across the grass towards her aunt.

‘Is that Hugh Winlaw, of the Southern-knowe, aunt? I thought I recognised the dog outside.’

The young lady nodded affably to the countryman as she caught sight of him departing.

‘I’ll bet he’s brought some trout from the young squire.’

‘That means you have been flirting with the young squire, mademoiselle. I see. No wonder six months’ retirement offers nothing terrible to you.’

‘Of course not. I thought I had better prepare the way without delay. He is going to teach me all the mysteries of green hackles, March browns, and May flies; of grouse and pheasant slaughter on the most extensive scale; of the elementary terms of horse-racing, book-making, and the whole duty of the turf. I must do something in the six months.’

‘Certainly you could not do better, my dear.’

‘But why did you dismiss Hugh so summarily? I wanted to see him; he is a fine fellow. I should not be at all above flirting with the squire’s tenant as well as with the squire’s son.’

‘I am very sorry to have deprived you of such a pleasure. I’ll soon call him back.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous, Mignonne!’ cried Clare, laughing, as Mrs. Monk actually ran down to the gate. ‘Aunt, come back, I tell you!’

The lady paid no heed. She was now in the road, and saw the young shepherd not more than thirty yards off. He had heard the gate, and instinctively turned. Mrs. Monk beckoned him.

‘Miss Langtoft is disappointed at not speaking to you, Hugh.’

A slight blush unmistakably accom-

panied the smile with which he came back to face them.

‘Of course I was,’ interposed Clare, coming up, mischievously radiant. ‘How do you do, Hugh?’

The young lady had even extended her hand to him, and he took it like a gentleman. She was obviously playful, but there was nothing in the way she carried her joke to hurt even the sensitive pride of a north countryman. There was open respect visible in her countenance, in addition to superabundant good-nature.

‘I am very well, thank you, Miss Langtoft.’

‘We shall come picnicing to Southern-knowe very soon, for I want to see my friend Luath do his wonderful work again.’

‘It will be a pleasure to him and to

me,' replied Hugh, politely. 'But it will not be at the Southernknowe, miss, for we are leaving there this week,' he added, looking to the ground, with unusual bashfulness for him.

'Leaving Southernknowe!' exclaimed the young lady; but, with a ready perception, she immediately added, in another tone, 'what a pity! But you are not going far away?'

'Only to Braidstruther.'

'Oh, that's right! Then we'll go up there, won't we, aunt?' said Clare, taking Mrs. Monk's arm to lead her through the gateway. 'Good-bye, Hugh; give my kind regards to your sister;' and with a gracious bow, such as a princess might give to a humble retainer, the young lady turned away from the interview.

'What an abominable shame!' exclaimed

Clare, indignantly. 'Whatever can they be leaving for? He is a good fellow, Mignonne, isn't he?'

'An excellent fellow.'

'It is some rascality of the landlord's. But come, aunt,' said Clare, with her usual vivacity, entering the house two steps at a time, 'I hope it is lunch-time. I am ravenous.'



## CHAPTER II.

## THE WHINSTONES.

PAUL WHINSTONE just knocked and burst into his mother's room.

‘Mother, Mrs. Monk is here,’ he exclaimed. ‘I have just met Miss Langtoft by the river.’

‘Oh!’ replied the lady, looking up suddenly through her spectacles, and keeping her lips slightly apart. ‘Really! I am very glad to hear it.’

Mrs. Whinstone was accustomed to her son's uncereimonious behaviour, so was

seldom inconvenienced by it. The lady who acted as her companion, equally used to it but never so patiently submitting, generally showed, in an unmistakable manner, her reception of the treatment. But she was a ten years' tried dependent, and herself of somewhat gentle lineage, so that some liberty of demeanour was excusable in her. As the young man came forward she bounced out of her chair with an expressive 'Well, sir!' and swept out of the room.

'She looks remarkably well,' continued Paul, dropping into the chair left vacant by Miss Westleigh, 'and says Mrs. Monk is well. Doesn't know how long they'll stay. You'll call in a day or two, won't you, mother?'

'As soon as is seemly, Paul. I will

take Margaret to see them. I should like her to know Miss Langtoft.'

'Hang it, I expect they'll only be here a week or two. We never have a chance of getting to know them properly. Miss Langtoft is a very good sort of girl. Different from the rest, somehow. Wider ideas, I suppose: more intellectual, and that kind of thing. Isn't that it, mother?'

'She has always impressed me very favourably. Yes, I am very pleased that they have come just now. Their company will help to accustom your sister to the quietness of this place. I am afraid she will feel it dull for some time.'

'Don't fear that. I'll take her in hand.'

'Now, Paul, I do wish to speak seriously to you about that. You must not get

Margaret into any of your wild ways. Do not think that a young lady can do all that you may do. It would be ridiculous and most improper. I want her to have intellectual and womanly interests, and I will not have her turned into a jockey, and the cruel creature that you so proudly call a sportsman. Do you hear me, Paul?’

‘She can take care of herself, mother, don’t you fear,’ he replied, laughing. ‘If she can’t, I’ll make no attempt to demoralize her. She shall be most proper. I am quite sorry for the girl. It’s a most awkward position for her, and as for the Queen’s Counsel,—’ he nodded in a contemptuous manner,—‘well, it is about the dirtiest trick ever heard of in a family history.’

‘Hush, boy! I won’t have you speak

like that to me,' exclaimed Mrs. Whinstone, with sudden anger. 'It is abominably low, and, if you can't refer to your father in a more becoming way, I forbid you to mention him at all in my presence.'

'Forgive me, dearest mother,' said Paul, taking and kissing her hand. 'I would cut off my arm rather than hurt you. But it is mostly on your account that I get so angry about it. I will say no more.'

There was a momentary trace of emotion in the old lady's face, and she was silent. Paul went on, so as to avoid any awkward pause,

'Yes, mother, I hope Miss Langtoft will be friendly with Margaret, it will be much more pleasant for the girl, for we are beastly short of companions here. But,

do you know, I believe Mr. Crook is after Miss Clare. Really, if the old parson could get up courage to say so, I believe he is in love with her.'

'Don't be ridiculous, Paul,' replied the lady, forced to smile. 'Poor Mr. Crook! I am afraid his reputation is not very secure in your hands. I thought it was Maisie Winlaw last week that you had allotted to him. If you begin to turn things in that direction, I shall have my suspicions of *your* motives.'

'Have no fear of that!' said the young man, with a light laugh. 'I am afraid of the girl, and you don't fall in love with anybody you're afraid of. She's too intellectual for my taste. But I like her very much, it does you good to talk to serious people sometimes.'

'Is Miss Langtoft serious, then? She

must present a very different aspect to you, Paul, from what she generally has done to me. I should have considered her anything but serious.'

'Not a dry stick ; I don't mean that. I can't exactly explain it, but you must know what I mean. The way she puts things, you know. There's more in her conversation, even in her fun, than in that of ordinary girls. Look at her by the side of Florrie Kidland, for instance.'

'She is a very intelligent young lady, certainly.'

'But how long will father stay ?' asked Paul, rising from his chair.

'He will return by the first train in the morning.'

'Oh, by Jingo ! short and sweet as usual. Shall see you at luncheon mother.'

‘I don’t think I shall come down to-day.’

‘No? Well, good-bye;’ he kissed her on the cheek, and left the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

‘Of course you will come to me before you go to the station, Paul,’ cried the lady after him.

‘Oh, yes.’

On the landing the young gentleman took a cigarette from his case, and lit it as he descended the stairs. He went into the dining-room for a glass of claret and lemonade, and whilst drinking it the letter-bag was brought in to him. He took the newspapers and such letters as were for himself, then withdrew to a summer-house in the garden, where he made himself comfortable for some time ensuing.

In the meantime, Mrs. Whinstone had



removed her spectacles and wiped a tear from her eyelashes. It was a most unusual occurrence for her to display emotion of this kind in her son's presence, but to-day she felt nervous and excited, and consequently unable to command the customary self-restraint. An explanation lay in the fact that a daughter whom she had not seen since earliest infancy was to-day,—twenty years afterwards,—to return and take up her abode in her natural home.

When Paul had glanced through the columns of the papers which he particularly affected, his mind too reverted to this momentous topic. It had been arranged that Mr. Elliott Whinstone should travel with his daughter to Angryburn Station,—that being the nearest point at which the people of High Feldom could touch the

railway, although a distance of eleven miles from the village; and there Paul was to be in attendance with the carriage to meet them. This young gentleman would very much have preferred the two hours' drive with his unknown sister alone, for intercourse with the Q.C. (as he always designated his father) was a matter of some difficulty to him, whilst intercourse with young ladies was very much of a pleasure.

This Mr. Elliott Whinstone was now the representative of an old border family, and possessor of the landed estates appertaining to that dignity. Not born in the direct line, and in the earlier part of his life not being even amongst the presumptive heirs to this property, he had begun his career as a professional man, depending for his advancement in life wholly upon

his own forensic ability. This had proved to be considerable, judging by the success which he had been able to command. So completely had his thoughts and ambitions been centred in his professional work, that when at the mature age of forty he was thrown unexpectedly into the position of presumptive successor to his distant relative the squire of High Feldom, Mr. Whinstone found himself still a bachelor. This casualty, however, apparently decided him, and before the next year was out the gentleman had married.

Within the limits of their own territory, at any rate, no Whinstone was ever expected to conduct himself, in any of the graver junctures of life, like another mere ordinary mortal. It was not surprising, therefore, that singular behaviour was currently reported to have characterized

the early years of Mr. Elliott Whinstone's marriage. By popular gossip it was vouched that his wife had, by some piece of natural mismanagement, had the hardihood to present to him by way of heir a puny, wholly inadmissible—girl, when everybody knew that the gentleman himself, like anybody surely so conversant with legal principles would have done, had naturally counted upon a boy. This practical joke was looked upon by the injured father as little short of a premeditated insult on the part of both mother and infant, and, as it was stated, he immediately decided to show both that he could effectually retaliate. With this intention, it was solemnly averred, Mr. Whinstone had forthwith banished the offensive offspring from his home, and forbidden the mother to hold any kind

of intercourse with it. How much of truth there was in this unlikely popular story we need not now investigate ; real evidence in the matter was naturally difficult to get at. But the fact was soon to be patent to all that a young lady, of age not inconsistent with the popular theory of her birth, had been admitted into the family circle at Feldom Hall, had assumed the family name of Miss Margaret Whinstone, and was undoubtedly allowed to pass in all respects as the daughter of the proprietor of the estate.

What was, with certainty, known was that, within the first four years of his marriage, at any rate, Mr. Elliott Whinstone had been blessed with the coveted son, and had, with that desirable consummation, been enabled to throw from his mind again the temporarily distracting

considerations of family affairs; also that, before such son had attained the age of five, Mr. Whinstone had succeeded to the property to the confines of which he had been so unexpectedly brought. This change in his fortunes, however, had worked no revolution in the gentleman himself. He clung to his old life just as when his whole maintenance depended upon it, and a visit to his country-seat was a matter of positive rarity. He was nothing of a sportsman, and had few, if any, of the other inherited tastes natural to a country gentleman: all these had been handed on to his son Paul, who was in no way averse from indulging them without the supervision of any paternal eye. He, in reality, was the squire, and he acted it extremely well, not unnaturally enjoying the *rôle* considerably.

With Paul's meditation in the summer-house to-day, even he became a little restless, and he soon sauntered off into the stable-yard. Here was great sound of splashing water, bucket handles, jingling harness, revolving wheels, accompanied by the professional hiss of the officials. The pleasant fragrance from the stable, the leather, and the wet, shining carriages revived Paul, and he soon felt in a better humour with the world at large. It was clear to him, however, that to-day he was deposed. He was answered in monosyllables, was jostled if in anybody's way, and could command scant attention at anybody's hands. In the house or out was the same bustling activity on all hands; the same pre-occupied indifference to all requirements of his.

It was not surprising, therefore, that

his luncheon was, in his own words, flung at his head. That he had foreseen, and was consequently prepared philosophically to accept. After the meal he gladly withdrew to his dressing-room, and was immured there for fully two hours. It was a summons from his mother that brought him forth, and to her room he went.

Mrs. Whinstone regarded her son with complacent pride as he came in to her. Paul had, upon this occasion, rigged himself out with a distinct view to effect, (not that, at any time, he was one of the negligent in attire,) for he had no intention of being snubbed by his father or sister as a mere provincial sporting bumpkin. He had felt momentary annoyance at his inability to make something of his moustache, but time alone could mend that for him.



‘Oh, that’s right, Paul; you *are* ready. Isn’t it time to start?’

‘Very nearly, I think. Scott will send up word when he’s ready. Don’t worry, there’s a dear.’

‘I want you to take these for Margaret,’ continued the lady, nervously, holding forth an exquisite bouquet. ‘Just give her them prettily, with my love. Don’t carry them on to the platform, you know, but put them on her seat in the carriage, so that when she gets in——’

‘Oh, all right, mother. I know how to do it, trust me.’

‘And take this shawl, my dear. She will feel the evening air on these hills cool after travelling.’

‘By George, mother, it is a stunner!’ exclaimed Paul, holding up the handsome article to admire it. ‘Is that all?’

‘Yes ; but, Paul, listen, my dear boy—do, for my sake, be friendly, cordial with your father.’

‘I will, I promise you. Good-bye.’

The train was due at Angryburn at 5.40 p.m., and, upon this particular evening, it was not more than ten minutes later. For some time Paul Whinstone had been on the platform, talking affably with the disengaged station-master, but not able to throw off altogether a sensation of nervousness at the prospective meeting. He would occasionally glance expectantly along the line—such few yards of it as were visible before it turned sharply round the brae—and try to fancy what topics he could possibly raise in order to keep up an appearance of such cordiality as his mother had enjoined upon him. Nothing would

suggest itself, so that he had to be content to trust to the inspiration of the moment.

The evening was beautiful, the sunshine still unusually warm for such early June, but mellowing to a golden hue, particularly noticeable where it played amongst the fresh green leaves of the couple of ash-trees by the line. The tarred wood about the station and the solitary goods-truck in the siding, with its oilskin cover, exhaled a perceptible perfume which lingered in the air. There was nothing to disturb the quietude except a blackbird whistling on a tree hard by, and the occasional jingling of the bits and harness of the horses outside. Presently a distant whistle was heard, and the station-master stepped aside to pull down a handle presumably communicating with some far-off signal.

Steam was audible, the panting engine rounded the corner, and Paul stood ready for the imminent encounter.

It was not until the three were seated in the carriage, rolling onwards to the hills, that their intercourse had a real commencement. The young lady, with her mother's flowers lying in her lap, sat beside Mr. Whinstone, facing the horses; Paul opposite, facing them.

'You will be tired with your long journey,' remarked Paul, looking into his sister's face frankly, but hesitating to use the Christian name so strange to him as yet.

'Oh, no, thank you. We have had a capital journey, haven't we, father? We came in the Pullman car to Newcastle, and I have quite enjoyed it.'

'But you haven't come in a Pullman

for the rest of the way, I know,' said Paul, smiling facetiously.

'No, Paul, we haven't,' replied his father. 'Your carriages are not palatial down here.'

Mr. Whinstone habitually spoke like this. He recognized that he was a stranger in these parts.

'But this makes up for everything,' cried Margaret, staring eagerly at the mountain scenery all around her. 'Real mountains! I have never seen any before. Have they names, Paul?'

'Oh, yes, they're all christened. Every one of them.'

'How charming! What are those two called that stand up so boldly above all the rest?'

'The Cheviot, the highest to the left: Hedgehope, the other peak.'

‘Really! You must teach me all of them, please.’

The young lady fairly outstared Paul. The attitude which she had instinctively assumed towards him was noticeable, showing a marked difference from that presented to her father. With Paul she immediately fraternized,—had not their relationship been known to them, one would have been tempted to use the other word, flirted. Her sparkling eyes fearlessly gazed into his as she talked to him; her laughter rippled pleasantly onwards. She, at any rate, evinced no shadow of restraint. Paul quite enjoyed it. He detected what appeared a slight taint of vulgarity, (so different, he at once thought, from Miss Langtoft,) but that, he decided, would rapidly wear off, and he pronounced her ‘a rattling girl’ forthwith, at once looking

forward to vastly improved conditions in the atmosphere of Feldom Hall.

Mr. Whinstone apparently regarded this frivolity with some impatience, but he by no means appeared the ogre that popular rumour would have led one to expect. He lay back in his seat, hearing and observing all, but speaking little. Distinctly a handsome man; possibly more so now under the mellowing influence of approaching age than in the more vigorous aspect of his manhood. Even now the countenance did not reflect placidity or repose of spirit, any more than a marked degree of benevolence.

‘How grey some of the hill-tops look!’ Margaret rattled on: it was difficult to her to be silent. ‘Just like old men’s heads; and some are deep blue-black. Whatever makes the difference?’

‘Some are grass; bent, as we call it; they are grey in appearance. Some are heather; they look dark.’

‘How queer to have no trees on them! And does nobody live on them at all?’

‘Oh, yes, sheep and shepherds,’ replied aul, with amusement.

‘What wild people they must be! I shall be afraid to go far from the house.’

‘You needn’t fear them; they are very good people in their way. A bit of poaching is about the worst of them.’

‘A bit of poaching, Paul! Are they poachers? What dreadful creatures! They shoot the gamekeepers at night, don’t they? I have read a lot about poachers in the papers.’

‘If you are afraid of all the country people that are poachers, you will cer-



tainly have a bad time of it,' laughed Paul.

'Have you had much trouble with them lately?' interposed Mr. Whinstone.

'Oh, no, nothing exceptional.'

'When you are the member, father,' said Margaret, seriously, 'do get some terrible laws made to frighten them. You will, won't you? The gamekeepers ought to be able to shoot them at once; don't you think so, Paul!'

'Well, hardly so summary. Some of my best men might be found missing if that was the law.'

'I am sure I shall be afraid to live here, then. I shall lie awake at nights and fancy I hear the horrid creatures prowling about the house. It is so very wild, that nobody could hear us if we wanted help.'

The prospect was such as to impress

one who had never been far from a populous neighbourhood. The hills were all around them, with wood and such cultivation as was possible on the lower lands alone. As they progressed westwards, the hills seemed to be gathering together more closely, standing shoulder to shoulder like a giant troop determined to contest the passage. The valley was narrowing, and cultivation becoming more scanty. Onwards wound the road, crossing the broad shingly river-bed now, and now surmounting a brae only to descend upon the other side.

‘We have plenty of retainers who will stand by us,’ observed Paul. ‘But I didn’t know, father, that you had any thoughts of becoming a member,’ he continued, turning towards this gentleman with some obvious surprise.

‘Oh, yes, he has,’ cried Margaret.

‘Sir Robert Selby has spoken to me about it,’ Mr. Whinstone remarked, unconcernedly. ‘He is anxious to resign very soon, and he gave me to understand that my name had been mentioned.’

‘Of course,’ interposed the young lady, fearlessly. ‘Do stand, father ; mustn’t he, Paul?’

Paul did not feel the same freedom of speech. His sister’s frankness amused him.

‘Yes, if I am formally asked, I think I shall do so,’ said the father.

‘Certainly,’ assented Paul. ‘Stop one moment, Scott.’

The horses had been for a few minutes walking up a steep incline overarched with trees, now as they reached the top Paul called out to the coachman.

‘Now, Margaret, look!’ he went on, pointing to what lay before them. ‘That is your destination.’

‘Very dramatic!’ muttered the elder gentleman, as the two others arose to look.

‘Oh, charming, enchanting, divine!’ cried Margaret, shading her eyes from the rays of the sun, which was just dipping to the summit of the Cold Law. ‘Is that the Hall?’

Just before them was an irregular hollow hemmed in by rugged heath-clad hills, with extensive fir-woods on the southern slope, and in the basin, partly hidden by the trees, appeared a few houses, presumably constituting a village. Behind the chimneys rose a great green mound with ruined masonry upon its summit. At the entrance to this secluded

valley, on the slope above the wide green haugh beside the river, was an ancient mansion, and to this was Margaret's finger directed. Such was High Feldom Hall.

‘Beautiful!’ continued the young lady, when the carriage was again proceeding. ‘Father, how can you be so indifferent to it?’

‘I am not indifferent to it. I am thinking of your laws about the poachers.’

## CHAPTER III.

MARGARET.

MRS. WHINSTONE heard the sound of approaching wheels, and went to stand in the open doorway. There was nothing to betray the effort by which she obtained the self-mastery, save an occasional movement of the walking-stick upon which she rested. The lady had dismissed her attendant, and stood upon the threshold of the mansion alone to receive, with becoming dignity, her looked-for visitors. They

all now saw her, and Paul waved his hand.

Immediately the carriage stopped, the young gentleman leaped from his seat, and went first to embrace his mother. As he had doubtless intended, his caress served greatly to strengthen her, and he increased the effect by hurriedly whispering,

‘It’s all right. We are all excellent friends.’

‘Ho, Margaret, mind the flowers!’ was his exclamation when he turned again, but his warning was too late to be of service.

In getting from the carriage the bouquet had fallen, disregarded, from the young lady’s lap, and immediately her foot had accidentally crushed them. Paul showed excessive annoyance at the mishap.

‘Oh, they are all right,’ said Margaret, without lowering her glance to look at them, and she went on to meet her mother

There was nothing hysterical in the meeting. Margaret, for her part, viewed almost critically the old lady before her, and Mrs. Whinstone offered her embrace with dignified restraint. As the girl’s lips touched her mother’s cheek, the latter experienced a chill, and very much of her former nervousness had left her. Outwardly there was nothing at all to betoken the shock, but Margaret herself vaguely suspected that she had failed to make an impression, and so felt resentful and proud. The greeting between husband and wife was strictly formal, and they all went into the house.

Dinner was naturally the first consider-



ation. The mother herself took Margaret to the chamber prepared for her, the young lady glancing with open curiosity at everything on the way; but, strangely, as most of their friends would have thought, not so garrulous as she had been even to Mr. Whinstone himself.

‘We have yet to learn each other’s tastes and requirements unfortunately, Margaret,’ remarked the mother, as they entered the girl’s room, ‘but I hope this room may be moderately comfortable until you can get it re-arranged to your own liking.’

‘We can easily alter anything I don’t like,’ Margaret replied, looking round the tastefully-furnished apartment. ‘I am afraid I am rather particular in some things; but it looks all right, mother,’ she added, immediately. ‘How awfully

strange to be calling *you* mother! Doesn't it seem queer to you for a girl to be calling you so? You are really my mother,' she went on, looking pertly into the old lady's face. 'You are older than I thought you would be, and they tell me you are not strong. Am I at all like what you have imagined me?'

'Not much, my dear,' was the subdued response.

'How? Do tell me the difference?'

'You are so much darker than I should have expected. I have fancied you taller, too, than you are.'

'And nicer and prettier, and what else?' she said, with her habitual giggle.

Mrs. Whinstone kept silence.

'You must have been awfully dull here all these years,' said Margaret, again going

to the window. 'I should think you are glad to have me back.'

'Yes, my dear, I am very glad; but especially for your own sake. I hope, Margaret, that we shall soon learn to love each other sincerely——'

'And what a nice fellow Paul is! Such a handsome young fellow. I am so proud of him. Is he engaged yet?'

'No,' said Mrs. Whinstone, with the first trace of impatience. 'He is not yet twenty-two.'

'Plenty are engaged before that. But I suppose I must get dressed.'

'Yes, we must not talk too long. I will send the maid to you. I think you will like her. Are you sure there is nothing I can do for you, dear? Have you got everything at hand that you will want?'

‘Oh, yes, thank you.’

Mrs. Whinstone rang the bell and withdrew. As she slowly traversed the landing there was nothing to betray the verdict of her heart. On the stairs, where she stood to rest for a minute, Paul ran into her.

‘Cheer up, mother!’ he said, in a whisper, laying his hand on her shoulder. ‘You are disappointed, I know. But she’s all right. We’ll soon polish her up a bit. She’s really better than we might have expected.’

‘Bless you, my dear boy!’ replied the mother, with repressed emotion. ‘Be quick, and come into the drawing-room.’

Margaret was radiant at the dinner-table. She was, of course, most elaborately dressed and bedizened in much

costly jewellery, which had been presented to her recently by her father. Nobody certainly would have been led to suspect that that evening she was passing through any particularly vital experience. She did not appear weighted with any problems of past, present, or future existence. Her mind was at liberty to embark upon any topic, and indeed she displayed a singular aptitude for miscellaneous conversation of the flimsy kind.

‘I suppose there is no such thing as society in these wilds?’ she asked her brother, at one point, playfully.

‘Oh, but there is. Widespread, certainly; but it makes you think more of your friends if you have to ride a few miles over the hills to visit them. Fortunately, just now, we have some neighbours in the village. People you will

like, I'm sure. Intellectual kind of people, you know, who travel a great deal.'

'And who may they be?' interposed the father.

'Mrs. Monk, who bought the Peel property. She is here just now with her niece.'

'What Monk is it? Any relation to the Monks of Devonshire?'

'I believe so,' said Mrs. Whinstone, who was the 'Pecrage,' so to speak, of the family. 'I have not asked the exact relationship. They are very seldom here.'

'I hope they are not too learned,' remarked Margaret. 'How old is the niece?'

'About your own age, and a delightful girl; isn't she, mother?'

'I think so,' replied the old lady.

Margaret looked into Paul's face with a smile of intelligence.

‘A friend of yours, evidently, sir. I am curious to see her, so as to judge of your taste.’

But Paul turned aside with a frown, and talked to his father about something else.

Presently, when Mr. Whinstone and his son were alone, they talked for a short time about the estate, and then about the elder's project of seeking a seat in parliament; into the latter of which Paul entered with unexpected zeal. As the proposed district was that in which they resided, and in which naturally he himself had influence, the prospect of an election opened to the young man a field for extensive entertainment, and he positively

urged his father to undertake the contest. By means of this subject of agreement, the two seemed to advance to a degree of friendliness not common in the history of their intercourse, and they were in an obvious state of good-humour when they joined the ladies.

In the drawing-room they found Margaret gleefully examining and criticising everything, fluttering about the room like a butterfly in a flower-garden. For everything she had some stock epithet of superlative significance. Their presence slightly subdued her, but she continued her survey. The discovery of a French window delighted her, and she got behind the curtain to peer into the twilight.

‘What does it open on to, Paul?’

‘Only a terrace. No mystery about it.’

‘What a divine night it is!’ cried the



girl from behind the blind and curtain.  
'Come and open this, do! I must peep out; it is all so quiet.'

'Just the time for poachers,' said Paul, facetiously.

'Oh, how horrid you are!' ejaculated Margaret, jumping out of her hiding-place and tearing the curtain in her haste.

'Nonsense—come, Margaret. Get your sister a shawl, please, Paul.'

Mr. Whinstone had stepped to the window, and now held the casement open. His daughter wrapped the shawl about her and stepped out, and he followed her on to the terrace.

It was an hour since the sun had set, and now, in the deepening twilight, June though it was, the air felt chill and frosty. What breeze there had been was no longer perceptible, not even amidst the sensitive

branches of the pine-trees. The sky to the north and west was intensely clear, showing in sharpest outline the dark undulations of the hills, and any roof or tree which chanced to stand up before it. Only a few strips of dead purple clouds were in the sky where the sun had left them, and in the zenith a star or two had come out.

Such sound as there was travelled far in the stillness. A restless dog in the village would startle the sheep under the crag two miles away. A cuckoo and a wood-pigeon seemed to answer each other from the farthest extremities of the east and west plantation ; and presently, louder still, a belated heron would utter his harsh, querulous croak as he sailed to his roost in the fir summits. Last and most

resonant of all, heard literally for miles, came the rhythmic ringing of a horse's hoofs. It rose and would sink again, as it was respectively in the open or beneath the trees ; for a minute it would die away altogether, but only to be heard again as sharply as before.

Mr. Whinstone and his daughter were listening to the sounds as they walked together outside. Margaret was quite fascinated by the romantic situation, and the coolness of the night air, coupled with the repose of the striking scene, seemed to call forth from the gentleman himself a small concession to geniality. He had lighted a cigar, and Margaret saw him smile as she gave way to a bit of enthusiastic prattle.

‘I once thought, Margaret, that there

must be some satisfaction in the contemplation of scenes like this ; but I soon outgrew it.'

'Then I must try to revive it in you, father. You must come here more frequently, and I will give you lessons. Just listen to that horse even yet. I thought we had lost it.'

'It was walking up the plantation hill. You will hear it for long enough yet. Plainly when it crosses the new bridge by the Haugh, four miles away.'

'Really, I should never have thought it possible. And what was that?' she asked, at hearing the loud metallic pipe of a pheasant near at hand.

'I really can't tell you. I never spent much time in studies of that kind. Paul must be your instructor in that direction.'

'Oh, yes, it will be delightful. I shall

want to learn everything. It is divine.'

'You think you will like your quarters, then? I am glad of it. It is time I—— Well, well, I shall be glad if you get satisfaction out of your life here. I—I—— acted rather hastily, you know. But you understand me now.'

'Oh, yes, I do,' replied the girl, with marked levity. 'This is reparation enough. If I had always lived here, perhaps I shouldn't have thought so much of it. Don't apologise any more, please.'

Then followed a momentary silence, and curiously, a bat seized that particular instant at which to swoop down at the inviting expanse of Mr. Whinstone's shirt-front, and for a second to flutter there.

The movement startled the girl, and she uttered a little scream.

'Whatever was that?'

‘Pooh, pooh! It’s only a bat, girl; it won’t eat you.’

‘A bat! Are there really bats here?’

‘Did you suppose they were all drowned in the flood, then?’

‘I suppose I did. What horrid things! Let us go in.’

‘One minute. You will find worse things in the world to face than bats, I can assure you. But I was going to say,’ the gentleman continued, in an altered tone, ‘that I regret—certain past necessities——’

‘But I say that is all forgotten now,’ interposed Margaret. ‘Don’t you believe me?’

‘Allow me to finish my sentence, please. I venture to hope that the effect of them may in a short time be effaced. That you will pay strict attention to the altered

habits of your position, and so forth. You see what I mean ?'

'Certainly. Upon your next visit I promise that you shall not be ashamed of me.'

Mr. Whinstone was annoyed by her, but he lit his cigar and kept silence.

'When shall we see you here again ?'

'I cannot say. It will depend upon these political arrangements. I am too busy a man to spend much time here in mere diversion. The country, moreover, never afforded diversion to me.'

'No, of course, everybody is not the same. When may I come to town ?'

'That I can't say,' replied her father, in a purposely decisive tone.

Silence followed, and again that distant horse was clearly heard. Before either spoke, there was a movement by the win-

dow, and Margaret nervously clutched her father's arm. But it was only Paul, and he came forward to where they were standing.

‘There is a woman wants to see you, father,’ he said; ‘but I can’t make out who she is. Some tramp or other unknown to this district. I can’t satisfy her. She will see you, the magistrate. Will you see her or not?’

‘I have not come here to act the magistrate,’ was the reply. ‘But yes, I will go,’ he added, throwing away his cigar. ‘Everybody has a vote in these days.’

‘In the hall.’



## CHAPTER IV.

## PROBLEMATICAL.

MRS. MONK was in her north-country household accounted of eccentric habits : by nobody more distinctly so than by the coachman Dodds. She would require to be driven out at the most remarkable hours, and, to a practical intelligence, with no conceivable motive of a rational kind. There are certain recognised causes, accepted even by coachmen, for duties after sunset, but to what end, social or hygienic, could a lady need a drive at

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such hour along a bleak and desolate road, with nothing but a gate on to the open moor at the farther end, and fir and birch-trees all the way? Such, however, had Mrs. Monk demanded upon this first evening after her arrival at the Peel. At half-past eight her brougham was to be ready for her, and, punctual to the minute, it was at the door.

Clare was in her own room, but Mrs. Monk immediately appeared, wisely enveloped in a long fur cloak as necessary protection against the evening chill, and, after repeating her instructions to Dodds, she took her seat in the carriage.

‘To the Swire Road gateway, Dodds, and back.’

‘Varry good, ma’am,’ with a salute, and both understood.

After all, the lady’s freaks were taken

in good part, for not only was Mrs. Monk personally a liberal mistress, but the servants were fair-minded enough to recognize the light nature of their services. Out of the last twelve months, they had seen the face of their mistress for barely two. An eccentric service was not grudged to her.

The carriage drove away, and the lady within leaned back in a corner. One of the windows was open to admit the cool current of air created by the movement of the vehicle, and towards this Mrs. Monk was gazing fixedly. They had not to pass through the village, so that her eye rested only upon tree and hedgerow, the shaded nature of the road excluding the wider prospect. For about a mile the road was level,—as nearly so as a hill country will admit,—but then began a short but steep ascent through a fir-wood. The horse was allowed

to walk, and the sound which had re-echoed through the stillness was no longer audible. About half-way up the hill a head appeared from the carriage window, and was turned this way and that. It did not look like that of Mrs. Monk.

There was nothing around but the silent depths of the wood, in which a squirrel or a bird made an occasional movement. After this momentary scrutiny, the carriage door was opened, noiselessly. A figure emerged, and the door was closed again with as little sound. Passing to the back of the carriage, the apparition seemed to vanish into the obscurity of the wood. The top of the hill was reached, and again the trot of the horse's hoofs resounded far and wide.

A crackling amongst the twigs and cones with which the undergrowth was sprinkled

would startle a silent wood-pigeon in the boughs, and with an eerie flap and rustle it fled to a deeper shelter. A disturbed pheasant would make a thundering noise, belabouring the air with a heavy thud-thud, enough, as it seemed, to arouse all the sentinels of the wood for miles around. It caused the dark object flitting between the tall pine-trunks to flit more swiftly still.

The wood was silent again, and on a path traversing an expanse of pasture which lay between its boundary and High Feldom Hall was a solitary woman. She was walking rapidly in the direction of the house, her eyes fixed upon the ground. The twilight was deepening, but when she was near to the building and had raised her face to regard it, she saw two figures upon the terrace on the south side of the

house. She screened herself behind some bushes, and got near enough to hear their voices; but the woman was unwilling to linger. She crept rapidly round to the back of the house, and gained an entrance to the kitchen yard. A dog barked, loud and deep, as she knocked, and a man-servant opened the door to her.

Mr. Whinstone was there, yes, but was not to be troubled by anybody. What did she want at this time of night? She must see him: he was a magistrate, and obliged to see her. The man paused, then consulted a fellow-servant.

‘Fetch Mr. Paul,’ suggested this one.  
‘Who is she, and what does she want?’

‘That’s none of your business.’

‘Where do you come from? You don’t belong to this countryside.’

‘All right, I will go round to the

front,' said the woman, as she turned away.

'Hold on: go and tell Mr. Paul, John.'

Paul came, but she declined to consult him. Mr. Elliott Whinstone, the magistrate, was the man she required, and nobody smaller could serve her purpose.

'Come in, then, my good woman, and I will see if he will come to you.'

The visitor was shown into the lower hall, and Paul went to his father.

As soon as Mr. Whinstone saw the face of the visitor in the lamplight, he evinced some surprise, then turned aside to a doorway and beckoned her to follow him. They entered the library, and the door closed behind them.

It was a large, gloomy room, with a lamp burning dimly at one end. There

was sufficient light to disclose the ranks of books which clothed the greater part of the walls upon all sides and to partially reveal the spectral features of austere ancestors who looked down from any available space amongst them. The gentleman brought forward a chair, but the visitor declined it. She stood in the centre of the room, and looked at Mr. Whinstone.

The woman was poorly clad, wrapped up in a dark grey shawl, which she held tightly around her. Nevertheless, she displayed considerable dignity of carriage, and a countenance handsome and refined. The gentleman tried to stand at ease, but did not seem, as one would have expected him to be, exactly master of the situation. As the silence was awkward, he broke it.

‘I hardly expected to see you here,’ he said.



‘Probably not; but I wished to have a few words with you, possibly for the last time. I did not tell you in London why I was willing to cancel our agreement and to restore your daughter to you unconditionally.’

‘You did not. I should rather like to know.’

‘You thought, no doubt, that I required her solely in order to injure you; although did you ever know me condescend to vulgar tactics of any kind? Did you, I say?’

‘Never, hitherto.’

‘And never will. Be assured of that. I have not lost a certain, what did you call it, intellectual piquancy,—wasn’t that it? Mere garments cannot affect this quality. My downfall did not, at any rate, make me vulgar. I do not love

coarse methods at all. I only required your daughter as a rational compensation to myself for—what is it called?—a ruined life. I thought it possible,’ she continued, cynically, ‘that I might have tamed her so far as to be a companion to me; that she might have made some return to me in the form of affection, and have lightened the burden of my life. With this object I claimed her.’

‘And then put her into the hands of others to rear.’

‘Yes, that she might not know the poverty to which I was condemned. I expected in a few years to be in a better position, and then she would have come to me. But, when the time arrived, again I paused.’

‘With what purpose that time, may I ask?’

‘You may,’ was the sharp reply : ‘and I will tell you. Briefly, because her inherited instincts proved to be ineradicable. She is worthless, and, being so, I was not inclined to burden myself with a commodity of that kind. Had she possessed one spark of a cultivated nature, be assured I should have clung irrevocably to my original compact, and you should never have possessed her. Being such as she is, I restore her, as she naturally belongs to you. Thus much I wished you to know.’

Mr. Whinstone attempted a smile, but it was a poor one.

‘And now, if you please, let somebody show me out.’

‘Stay!’ exclaimed the gentleman, impulsively, as she turned towards the door. ‘Let me do something for you. Your

attitude is preposterous. Name your own method. I don't care what it is, but something I will do. You shall not continue to peregrinate the country like this.'

'Retro me!' cried the woman, indignantly; but added instantly, 'Yes, you shall do something for me, but not now. Let me out. I have several miles to walk before I rest to-night.'

He was powerless to move her, so he rang the bell, and the visitor departed.

When outside she did not take the path by which she had come, but, as it was darker, skirted the house more closely. The voices on the terrace were still audible as she passed behind the bushes, for Paul had stayed there with his sister when Mr. Whinstone withdrew. For a few moments the woman stayed.

‘Isn’t this jolly, Paul? Awfully romantic.’

‘Oh, yes, it’s a grand place in the summer and autumn, and winter too, for a matter of that. It’s a bit quiet when nobody’s here, but I nearly always have fellows down for fishing or shooting. We’ll have some when the Q.C.’s gone. Mother’s awfully good, and will do anything as long as I don’t go to town too often, or to Oxford,’ he added, with a laugh.

‘You were at Oxford, were you?’

‘I’m there now, you know. I shall have to be a bit more regular now you have come home.’

‘Oh, don’t leave me here alone! I can’t bear quiet.’

‘No, no. I shall be backwards and forwards, of course. But look here, Margaret, you must be attentive to the old

lady, do you understand? It's cursed—beastly lonely for her, and she has naturally looked forward to your company a good deal. You'll promise me to be very kind and affectionate to her, now won't you?'

‘Yes, of course I will. Do I seem as if I wished to be anything else?’

‘No, but I want you to be careful in little things. We are young, you know, but she's not; and, what with being an invalid so long, she's got sensitive, and that sort of thing. About those flowers in the carriage. I wish you had made a bit more of them. Taken them to her when you arrived, and thanked her for them, do you see? She's awfully fond of flowers, and she would very much have preferred you to tread upon her corns; she would indeed.’

‘All right,’ exclaimed the young lady, with a pout. ‘I’ll remember.’

‘Now, don’t be offended. Just listen to that horse yet. It’s coming back, I think.’

This seemed to arouse the listener, and she turned hastily away, disappearing in a plantation of shrubs amidst which it was impossible to trace her in the dusk.

The ground sloped a little, and after a short distance there was a stream with a copse beyond. Having leaped the water, the woman plunged into the undergrowth, and, after a rough climb, reached the boundary wall. She looked over to the road which was on the other side and listened. There was no sound now save that trot of a horse’s hoofs at a distance. She groped her way along behind the wall, the ground dipping again abruptly, and thus rendering the path anything but a

safe one, but her step was sure. At the bottom she stood until the horse was upon the road beside her.

It passed, and almost immediately the trot was changed to a walking pace to ascend the hill. The woman looked over cautiously, and had in an instant scaled the wall. It was Mrs. Monk's carriage that was there before her, and she ran to it. She crept from the back to the left side; the door was opened noiselessly, and the woman stepped in.

Mrs. Monk raised the window, and the coachman thought he heard his mistress laugh; but that was all. In a moment the horse again broke into a trot, and it was not long before the carriage was entering the gateway at the Peel. The notes of a piano could be heard through the open window, and somebody singing, but both



stopped abruptly, and Clare came out into the dusk to receive her aunt.

‘ Here you are, you churlish wanderer !

‘ “ I keep no shades  
Nor shelters, I, for either owls or rere-mice.” ’

‘ Well done, Clare ! ’ cried Mrs. Monk, laughing gleefully as she alighted. ‘ You have got that out of the quotation-book for the occasion, I know. Where’s it from ? I challenge you. You forgot to look at the reference.’

Dodds appreciated the joke, for he chuckled to himself as the ladies entered the house.

## CHAPTER V.

## PAST AND PRESENT.

UPON Mr. Whinstone's return to the drawing-room, the visitor was easily explained, and nobody thought anything more about her. The gentleman was not alone with either of his children that night, nor did he seek any interview with them in the morning. Breakfast was early, and soon after nine the dog-cart stood at the door to convey Mr. Whinstone to the distant station.

The sun was already hot when Paul and

his sister stood on the steps to bid their father farewell, but there was a delicious freshness and fragrance in the atmosphere which exhilarated both of them. There was no obvious distress on the part of anybody at the prospect of separation, and perhaps Mr. Whinstone did not regard with complete satisfaction the airy manner in which his daughter waved him on his journey. At any rate, he looked at her rather critically as he was leaving, and Paul fancied he could read something of the expression upon his father's features. Five minutes after he had left them, he was certainly far enough from the minds of both.

The morning was spent in a survey of the establishment, and an enjoyable occupation they made of it. The young lady was enraptured with everything, and her

brother found an unsuspected interest in the familiar surroundings by reason of the fresh element involved in the examination. Under a plea of weariness from the excitement of the previous day, Mrs. Whinstone left them again at liberty after their meeting at luncheon, and, by way of variety, they resolved to walk down to the village. For this ceremony Margaret made elaborate preparation, deeming it necessary, no doubt, to offer an imposing appearance to her dependents upon a first visit.

‘That will do,’ commented Paul, with a smile, when the young lady reappeared after a prolonged seclusion.

‘Don’t scoff. You must know that every booby of a villager will be staring their eyes out.’

‘Quite right, quite right. I had no

wish to scoff. I am quite proud of you, I assure you.'

'Are you really? Aren't you awfully disappointed with me, as I know Mrs. Whinstone—mother, I mean—is.'

'Don't talk nonsense, Margaret. Mother's no more disappointed than I am. She doesn't want you to be as staid as a nun. I shouldn't care for you if you were, I can tell you. The dear old lady is seldom demonstrative.'

He made a slight mental reservation in favour of himself, but he always admitted that upon that subject his mother was distinctly foolish.

'I should think not,' observed Miss Whinstone.

'But when did you first know about coming here?'

‘Only a month ago. I had suspected something unusual about myself for a long time, but couldn’t get to the bottom of it. Oh, how I hated that life with the Simpsons! They were booksellers, you know,’ she said, blushing deeply; ‘and to have called them father and mother! What a deliverance this is! If I could only tell you. I knew that I was made for this. I hated the very thought of tradespeople always, and was wretched to think of the degradation I was born to. Wouldn’t you?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. There’s no degradation if the people are honest, and know their place. Of course I shouldn’t care for it now, but if I had been born to it I don’t suppose I should have fretted much about it. Were they unkind to you?’

‘Bless you, no! They did all they

could, poor things. But they were dissenters, too! I rebelled against that, though, years ago, and I always went to church. I liked to go and fancy, for an hour or two at any rate, that I was respectable. Wasn't it strange? It's nature, isn't it?'

'Curious, certainly.'

'I have cried a whole night through, after I have come from church, because I wasn't somebody else I had seen there. Some doctor's or lawyer's daughter, perhaps. Ha, ha! Oh, if I had known!' she cried, angrily. 'To think of what I am, and they in those seats! Isn't it maddening?'

'Only a lawyer's daughter, after all, Meg,' interposed Paul, silyly.

'Ha, yes, but slightly different.'

'Well, I suppose we are all the children

of Adam,' commented her brother, in truth rather tired of the vein which she had adopted.

'Oh, you radical! I should never have thought it of you.'

'Hush, here's the vicar. You must be extremely proper.'

'What's his name?' whispered Margaret.

'Mr. Crook.'

'Not a bad one from his appearance.'

'My sister, Mr. Crook,' explained Paul, with a friendly smile. 'Margaret, may I introduce your vicar to you? Mr. Crook.'

'I am most happy to see you, Miss Whinstone, and to welcome you to your northern home.'

The young lady bowed graciously.

'The first time you have seen our border fastness, I believe. Oh, yes, it is charming. One sniffs historical associa-



tions in the very atmosphere. Not an acre but has its tale to tell. Tragical, yes, for the most part, but stirring. You will be vastly interested, I am sure.'

'I shall, Mr. Crook, I'm sure, and I shall look forward to hearing the associations from you. It is all so delightful to me.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' replied the clergyman.

'You will not have seen Mrs. Monk yet, I expect?' interposed Paul.

'Seen her? How do you mean? She is not here now.'

'Oh, yes, she is. They came the day before yesterday.'

'I knew nothing of it, Paul. That's good news,' he added, vivaciously. 'Why, we shall be quite reanimated by our new acquisitions,' he said, looking at Margaret

good-humouredly. 'I must go and pay my respects at the Peel, and that speedily, or they may be off again.'

'That's the worst of it,' remarked Paul, but at once changed his tone. 'By-the-by, to-morrow I am going to ride over to Braidstruther, Mr. Crook; would you object to come?'

'Enjoy it beyond anything. Two or three? Three; very good. I'll be ready.'

'What a queer little man!' said Margaret to her brother, when they were again alone.

'Yes, that is the Reverend Laban Crook, vicar of High Feldon,' replied Paul, 'and a very decent fellow he is, too; so long as he will keep off the subject of border ballads. They are a craze with him, and they become an awful bore. But he is the best fly-fisher in the king-

dom, I believe, and that will excuse a good deal.'

'Oh,—and what's his wife like?'

'He hasn't got one.'

'I don't wonder.'

'But they say he is in love.'

The young lady did not restrain her laughter.

'And likely to remain so, I should think. Who is the fortunate lady?'

'A shepherd's sister; Maisie Winlaw, they call her.'

'A shepherd's sister, and he a clergyman!'

'But Maisie is not half a bad girl, I can tell you. Besides, the Winlaws are not exactly like ordinary shepherds.'

'I suppose it is all planned out, then, for me to marry the coachman, if he isn't quite an ordinary coachman.'

‘Subject to your own approval, of course,’ replied Paul, solemnly. ‘But wait until you see Maisie before you blame the parson. Can you ride, Margaret?’ he asked, suddenly.

‘No,’ she replied, with a flash of angry vexation.

‘Oh, you’ll have to learn. I was only going to say that, if you could, you might have come with us to-morrow. We can’t drive a carriage up there. Hugh Winlaw and his sister are coming into a place of ours in a day or two, and I want to see if they’ve got it ready for him. Poor Hugh has been unfortunate. He was made for better things than herding.’

Margaret was not paying much heed to her brother, as they were just then passing by the few houses that constituted the village; and the young lady was anxious

to observe how many of the cottage inmates were peeping from behind their curtains.

‘Do they all know about me?’ she asked, hurriedly, of Paul. ‘About the bookseller’s, I mean.’

‘Oh, no. There’s plenty of gossip, of course, but they don’t know anything with certainty.’

Margaret nodded with satisfaction, and by her gesture gave an utterly annihilating blow at the whole world of trade and dissent. There was a little fierceness in her manner which, upon a closer scrutiny, might have been construed into a doubtful kind of screen for a background of nervousness. Her glance darted to and fro with an uneasy self-consciousness, and her thin lips curled into what was more

of an insipid sneer than the dignified smile for which it was intended.

‘Is this all the place, Paul?’

‘Yes, all of it—church, post-office, school, and inn.’

‘Ha, ha! What a funny little place! Butter and bacon at the post-office. Pah! our letters must be all greasy.’

‘We have a separate bag for the Hall,’ remarked her brother.

‘Oh, of course, how silly of me; how very stupid. And whose house is that up there!’

‘That is the Peel, Mrs. Monk’s; the lady I have spoken about.’

‘Oh, yes,’ was the reply, accompanied by a significant smile and a glance from the very dark eyes. ‘I wonder whether we shall see the young lady about.’

They passed the gateway without any such encounter as she suggested. Margaret stared critically at the house and garden, but Paul kept his eyes upon the pine-wood before them.

‘It’s quite a small place,’ commented the young lady, more to herself than her companion ‘And what’s that old ruin up above there?’

‘That’s the Dour Crag; it’s a rock, not a ruin.’

‘Why, you are looking the wrong way,’ laughed the girl. ‘Here, on this side. That’s a ruin, isn’t it?’

‘Oh, yes, that’s the old Peel—an old fortress; we call them Peels in this part of the country.’

‘Because they peeled people in them, I suppose, ha! ha!’

Margaret seldom exactly laughed. It was an ever-ready giggle with which she was troubled.

‘Can’t we go up to it?’

‘No, of course not,’ replied Paul, impatiently. ‘It is in Mrs. Monk’s private ground. You can go up when you call upon them.’

‘But not private to Mr. Whinstone, I hope?’ cried a cheery voice from within the enclosure, and immediately a radiant face appeared above the bushes to the slight discomfiture of the two upon the road. ‘How do you do?’ went on the lady, laughing. ‘Do pardon my bit of eavesdropping. I only heard the last few words.’

Paul laughed pleasantly too.

‘I don’t think we committed ourselves too much,’ said he. ‘But what a pleasure



it is to see you here again, Mrs. Monk !  
May I introduce my sister to you ?'

They bowed.

'Do come in, Miss Whinstone. Neighbours are too scarce to allow any to pass our gates. It is too bad of your brother to stand upon so much ceremony. I think we are entitled to a little relaxation down here, don't you ?'

They returned to the gate and entered.

'Thank you so much for the fish yesterday, Mr. Paul. It was delicious. Oh, that's right, here's Clare coming. We will all go up together.'

Miss Langtoft came from the house towards them, and was equally hearty in her reception of the visitors. A very few words seemed to put them all upon a comfortable footing. Clare was always ready for a scramble up to the Peel, so off they

went. Mrs. Monk and Paul led the way : the two young ladies followed.

Paul was generally inclined to be nervous with Mrs. Monk, but her exceptional vivacity to-day put him immediately at his ease. She was obviously gracious by design, for her genial flow of small talk and her ready laughter were a source of constant amusement and surprise to Clare as she thought of her aunt's ordinary mental attitude to young gentlemen of leisure.

'Oh, was Mr. Whinstone here? I wonder he could tear himself away so soon. The country is so exquisite now.'

'He cares little for the country,' said Paul.

'No, of course, he is a busy man. But I am sure you take his place admirably. No, I don't mean to flatter you, indeed.

To act the country gentleman well requires an art by no means natural to all who are born to the position.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Monk. I should have feared you would have thought me one of the most useless of the community.'

'You cannot seriously have thought so, Mr. Whinstone. Pray do not think that I require material employment as a criterion of worth. I am not sufficiently democratic for that. I have quite a partiality for such as the practical world considers idle, that is if their idleness has its purpose and is becomingly sustained.'

'I see,' said Paul, laughing. 'I am glad that I fulfil the requirements. I wish I could instil some of your excellent theory into our good vicar, Mr. Crook.'

‘Oh, does he think you very bad?’

‘Past all hope, I fear, because I am unable to develop, what he calls, a rational enthusiasm for a ballad and a botanical specimen. Little else counts with him in this world.

‘What! not the red hackle?’

‘Oh, yes, but in that I anger him because I prefer the black.’

‘Well, really, you are too bad. Don’t you think so, Clare?’ asked the lady of her niece who, with her companion, had just come up to them.

‘I didn’t hear the point.’

‘Mr. Whinstone prefers the black hackle to the red, and in the face of Mr. Crook’s opinion, too!’

‘Shocking!’ exclaimed Clare, with a proper degree of horror at such flagrant heresy.

‘What ever are hackles?’ asked Margaret, in perplexity.

‘Oh, you have got to learn all the mysteries of fly-fishing, Miss Whinstone, I see.’

‘We must get your brother and the vicar to teach us all about it, mustn’t we?’ interposed Clare, looking at Margaret. ‘I am sure I am as ignorant as you.’

‘That will be delightful,’ Paul exclaimed, looking at Miss Langtoft with more than mere polite acquiescence.

In the course of their few minutes’ intercourse, Clare had come to a kindly feeling towards Margaret. She knew the current gossip with regard to the girl’s past, and that was enough to prepare the ground for a ready sympathy. As soon as the peculiar disposition of Miss Whinstone was apparent to her, (and it required

no effort to read it,) Clare was inspired with an interested pity rather than contempt, and was at once actuated by a determination to exercise unlimited forbearance towards what appeared the other's painful defects. To some this would have been difficult, seeing the attitude which Margaret herself had assumed. This young lady was impressed with the supremacy of her position, and thought that a little arrogant patronage was necessary towards one who inhabited so insignificant a dwelling as the Peel. Her behaviour, moreover, was not improved by the background of consciousness as to her own inferiority. Clare's cultivated composure irritated her unspeakably, and, instead of analyzing it for adoption, she resented it with envious disdain. Clare was perfectly aware of it all, but it fell from her unheeded.

When they were at the summit of the green knoll, somebody effected an exchange of partners. It was a natural thing to do, and would have called for no sort of comment had not Mr. Whinstone appeared to reap such noticeable satisfaction from the rearrangement. Of a sudden he had become an enthusiastic historical, or archaeological, student, and in five minutes, under the instruction of the vivacious Clare, knew more of the history and structure of the dilapidated Peel than he had been able to gather in all the previous twenty-one years of his existence.

‘There are fascinations about this historical reading, after all,’ he thought, ‘and it is ridiculous to know no more about the hills than the sheep that graze them. I mustn’t snub old Crook’s dissertations as I have been in the habit of doing.’

‘I do feel ashamed of myself, Miss Langtoft,’ he said, aloud, ‘and I think we must make a compact.’

‘By all means,’ she said, gaily. ‘Of what kind?’

‘If I am to teach you and Margaret the mysteries of fly-fishing, you ought to teach us the delights of local history; that’s fair. It never appeared interesting to me before, you know.’

‘I am sure that is a very pretty compliment, and I fully appreciate it.’

‘Will you agree?’ asked Paul, quite radiant.

‘By all means, if you wish it. It is only fair, as you say. But, fortunately for you, I shall soon weary you.’

‘That is a matter of opinion.’

‘I have your own and Mr. Crook’s word upon it. You admitted it yesterday.’



Paul seemed caught, and perhaps blushed slightly.

‘But I spoke of Mr. Crook’s methods. He is so terribly prosy.’

‘Oh, that is too bad. I can’t agree with you. Mr. Crook always seems to me the most imaginative of men. I must decline a compliment at the expense of a friend.’

‘I wouldn’t disparage him for the world,’ said Paul; ‘but I must state the facts of my experience.’

‘Why did she so readily defend Mr. Crook?’ he wondered; ‘were they such intimate friends?’

‘He’s the dearest little man, of course,’ he hastened to continue; ‘nobody knows that better than I do, but he has his crotchets, like the rest of us.’

‘Yes, indeed, what man is worth much

that is without them? They make half the interest of life.'

'What are my crotchets, I wonder?' asked Paul, with an ingenuous egoism, half fearing that he had none.

'Yours? Oh! Mr. Whinstone, I believe you think you are free from them, and therefore not—worth much,' she said, with quite girlish laughter.

'You really are a thought-reader, Miss Langtoft.'

'Safely dispel the thought, or I shall be tempted to enumerate.'

'I wish you would.'

'Well, you prefer the black hackle to the red, for one thing. I have heard you say that you prefer to fish down the stream instead of up. Do you want more?'

'Please.'

‘You care nothing whatever for a border ballad; very much for a well-bred horse. You prefer the heath to the pavement,—a fox to an equation. Are not these enough to redeem you?’

Paul suspected that she was making fun of him, but somehow he enjoyed it. She did put things so nicely, he thought, and even to hear her twit him was delightful; none the less so because the discovery was a new one.

‘Yes, I suppose these are crotchets,’ he said, with a laugh; ‘but they are not generally called so. I am glad they are the worst you can bring against me.’

‘I didn’t say that,’ replied Clare.

Then they reached the gate into the garden by which Mrs. Monk and Margaret were standing.

‘Now, Mr. Whinstone, you must promise

me not to stand upon such ceremony again,' said the elder lady. 'Will you?'

'Very gladly, Mrs. Monk, I assure you ; but I hope you will also give me such a promise with regard to our place.'

'To be sure we will, since you are kind enough to ask it. Clare will no doubt be glad to take a hand at tennis with you sometimes.'

'And to discourse history whilst doing so,' added that young lady, playfully.

'Delightful,' assented Paul, and they all walked on towards the road.

## CHAPTER VI.

## OVER THE MOOR.

IT was a warm afternoon, but overclouded, when Mr. Paul Whinstone and the vicar set off for their ride across the moor. The two riders might have afforded a subject for mirth to any waggish stranger that had chanced to see them passing through the village. The aristocratic appearance of the 'young squire,' in irreproachable outfit, seated gracefully upon a fine chestnut horse; and the diminutive figure of the parson in his plain, clerical jacket and

trousers (the latter pulled a good couple of inches above his boots) seated upon his grey, imperfectly-trimmed pony, did certainly offer a contrast sufficiently striking to excuse a good-natured smile in any beholder.

Beyond the village the full quietude of the locality was perceptible. The breeze from the hills in the west was noiseless except for its whisper amongst the favoured pines. Their horses' hoofs made the loudest noise of all, until a heron barked harshly in the depths of the fir-wood which the riders were approaching, repeating his croak as he sailed in deliberate majesty overhead, with his eye bent upon the river.

‘Yes, they are delightful, if not altogether intelligible neighbours,’ remarked Mr. Crook.

‘Why not intelligible?’

‘I referred especially to the elder lady. I may be abnormally obtuse, but, honestly, I don’t understand Mrs. Monk. Miss Clare is charming, wholly delightful. Mrs. Monk is a mystery to me.’

‘I can’t say that I have felt much mystery about her,’ replied Paul, thinking of the lady’s open geniality towards him but the previous day.

‘Possibly not. In many respects I am dense: but I cannot nail this lady. I suppose it is her advanced culture which puts her beyond me. My homely training has not fitted me for the deciphering of such a modern complex civilisation. I can only pretend to understand the old-fashioned types.’

‘You say you can understand Miss

Langtoft; I should hardly call her of the old-fashioned type.'

'Oh, yes. She is at heart of the oldest fashion; not at all complex. Rather sentimental, in a better sense. That always gives you a hold. I don't believe Mrs. Monk, as a positive personal characteristic, has one spark of sentiment. Pardon my speaking so freely, Paul; I should not wish you to repeat a syllable of it.'

'Certainly not; but it interests me. You know them a good deal better than I do.'

'Oh, dear no!' said the clergyman.

'Do you really think Miss Langtoft sentimental?'

'In a good sense, yes, very. She loves an old ballad, for instance, more than I can tell you,' added Mr. Crook, with a sly thrust at his companion, alighting as he



spoke to open a gate into the wood.

They turned through the gateway, and began slowly the ascent beneath the shade of the fir-branches. Mr. Crook was on foot, leading his pony by the bridle. The slope was steep, and what had once been merely a foot-track for a shepherd and his flock, was now eaten into a zig-zag, pebbly channel, which every rainfall deepened in the peaty, sandy soil. The shallow, spreading roots of the fir-trees, with their insecure grip of mother earth, protruded in places from the surface, and were moss-grown. A tuft of heather or of wiry, bent grass only found here and there a foothold upon the dark, barren mould, amidst layers of brown cones and needles, lichen-covered twigs, and various kinds of moss and fungi.

‘ Yes, possibly ; because she views them

historically,' said Paul, thinking again of his yesterday's conversation.

'Exactly. That is the only rational way of viewing them. It is exactly the historical association which makes them precious, and makes this the most glorious district in the whole of Great Britain. Life without such romantic associations would be intolerable. That is why emigration to one of my temperament would mean either death or lunacy. It is simply the reflective versus the practical. What does Wordsworth say ?

“ And what for this frail world were all  
That mortals do or suffer,  
Did no responsive harp, no pen  
Memorial tribute offer ?  
Yea, what were mighty nature's self ?  
Her features, could they win us,  
Unhelped by the poetic voice  
That hourly speaks within us ?”

This is exactly what Miss Langtoft feels.'

‘Do you really think so?’ said Paul, looking seriously at his horse’s ears. ‘Yes, I suppose it is.’

‘I am convinced it is, sir. To nobody does the poetic voice speak more clearly.’

Such vein struck rather deeper than Paul was in the habit of sounding, and apparently afforded matter for reflection, for he did not speak again until they reached the gate at the top of the wood.

‘How long will they stay here, Mr. Crook?’ he then abruptly exclaimed.

‘My dear fellow, what do I know of the matter? It was from you that I heard of the ladies being here, so you see I have no private source of information as to their movements.

As the parson was fastening the gate, Paul threw at him a quick glance of scrutiny, and then turned onwards with a

smile. No, no: the thought was too ludicrous. Excellent little man as he was, still he was over forty after all, and betrayed very little, certainly, of the lady's-man in his appearance. Paul burst into a hearty laugh at the passing fancy.

'Don't those crags make an excellent face?' he said, pointing to the rocks at the summit before them to explain his hilarity.

It took some time for Mr. Crook to perceive it, if indeed he was able to at last.

They still ascended, but were now upon open ground—an expanse of dark green heather, variegated by the lighter patches of bracken and damp moss. After passing the great boulders at the summit, all signs even of a limited cultivation had vanished, and the hill prospect opened

out before them. Just in front, hemmed in upon all sides by grey rock and heather, lay the gloomy tarn known as the Dour Lough; a wild, desolate spot, appropriately the subject of much eerie tradition in the neighbourhood. The clergyman's eyes visibly sparkled as they rested upon the ruffled surface of the dark water where lay vividly reflected the sky and the rocks around. From this he glanced beyond at the far-stretching moorland, simply an unvaried sweep of barren heath, noting at some distance a lonely house with a clump of trees beside it, the only trace of the presence of man in the whole of this sombre waste. The sun was screened by the unbroken cloud ridges, but some strong vertical rays were thrown upon the farthest ridge against the grey, western horizon.

‘See, Paul,’ said the vicar, pointing towards it, ‘see how the Scots are hauling down the sun.’

Paul smiled, but offered no remark.

Not a sound was to be heard ; the very birds appeared to shun the terrible loneliness of this place, until a hidden grouse grumbled from the heather beyond the pool : ‘Come-out, c’m-out, c’m-out, m’out, m’out, m’out!’

Soon after passing the lough they struck a more discernible track of sand and stones, and here Paul broke into a canter, being followed by the clergyman at a more sober trot. When not far from the solitary house already referred to, Paul slackened his pace so that his companion might come up to him.

‘Gruesome work out here all weathers,

Paul, despite associations historical or otherwise.'

Paul laughed aloud.

'It must indeed be so if you admit it.'

'It amazes me that a fellow of Winlaw's energy can endure it.'

'And me, too. But he is a singular fellow,' said Paul. 'He says he likes the freedom, but suggest emigration and he appears insulted.'

'Yes, I know. On that point I am at one with him.'

'It is well that all are not. Now I thought he would be insulted by an offer of this place, but at the merest hint he snapt it up and begged me to give it him. Who is that standing in the doorway?'

'I see nobody.'

'Not now. It was a woman, I think.'

She went in when she saw us. Maisie, I suppose, come over to inspect.'

They were soon at the house. Up the front stood a ladder, and door and windows were open. From within came sounds of workmen; and the smell of paint, as well as the splashes of whitewash on the window-panes, gave sufficient indications of what was going on there. Both dismounted, and, after fastening their horses to the branches of an elder-tree, they went in.

Paul began to examine the repairs which were being effected, and to enter into a conversation with the men about them. The clergyman strolled away to examine the locality from his own less practical point of view. There was nothing in the architectural structure or age of the building to engage his attention, so



that Mr. Crook soon found himself among the few stunted trees which sheltered the house on the north-west, examining the scant herbage which grew beneath, and at times the bark of the trees themselves, with an ardour only possible to a professed naturalist. From this, unconsciously, he crept onwards, descending the brae into the creasé down which the burn ran to join a larger stream below. His eyes were fixed upon the ground about him, and occasionally he stooped to pluck a sprig or a leaf which excited his attention. Thus absorbed, he reached the bottom of the brae, around which the water made a sharp turn. Here he stopped and glanced about him before retracing his steps.

Entirely to his surprise, on the bank immediately before him sat a woman, apparently engaged in deepest meditation.

Her face was away from him, and rested upon one hand heavily, and, as the clergyman's step had been noiseless, his approach had not disturbed her. For a second or two he hesitated in nervous indecision, and such pause immediately betrayed him. With that remarkable instinct by which we are able to feel a human presence without any conscious assistance from the ear, the girl turned sharply round and looked angrily at the intruder. Mr. Crook then advanced a step or two nearer.

‘Pardon me, Miss Winlaw,’ exclaimed the little man, seriously, ‘I had not the slightest suspicion of your being here.’

‘It is not kind to follow me like this, Mr. Crook, when you knew I didna want to see you,’ said the other, with a sudden change of colour.

‘I trust you do not fully recognise the

meaning of your words. Indeed I had no knowledge of your presence here. I came solely to look for flowers. I am extremely distressed that I disturbed you, and will go at once.'

The clergyman displayed an unexpected attitude, having regard to the girl's apparent social position. There was no kindly patronage on his part, no suspicion of humility on hers.

'I thought you had come purposely,' said Maisie, apologetically, intending thus indirectly to recall him. 'And I wished to be alone. Did Mr. Whinstone see me?'

'I think he did, and he would no doubt suppose you to be in the house.'

The girl's face showed traces of past emotion, although ill-humour was the prevailing expression of it now.

'If I had come purposely to seek you,

would it have been unkind?' said the clergyman, seeing that the young woman remained silent. 'Would it not have been a duty of my position?'

'No, not to me,' was the ready reply. 'You know that sympathy is useless to me, and annoys me.'

'Can I then do nothing at all to—to gladden you?'

The girl looked up at him hurriedly—a searching glance which the little man received unmoved.

'Not yet, Mr. Crook, thank you; I shall get used to it. You must know,' she continued, more mildly, 'how I feel it. All my life I have been at the South-ernknowe; so was my father, and my father's father. Thank God none of them can see it. This place is strange to me, and—and not our own.'

‘But, Maisie,’ said the vicar, with kindly earnestness, ‘you would at some time have left the Southernknowe; you would have married——’

‘I should never have left it,’ she asserted, vehemently—‘never!’

‘Hugh could never have lived there always.’

‘His father did.’

‘Yes, he did, but—but I am only troubling you. Cheer up!’ he added, lightly. ‘I have known what trouble is—but you dislike sympathy. Good-bye,’ he said, looking into her face with a peculiar smile.

Maisie lowered her eyes as she shook hands with him.

‘Good-bye, Mr. Crook.’

‘I shall see you more cheerful yet,’ said the clergyman, as he turned away.

Paul was outside the house with one of the men when Mr. Crook reached it.

‘Has Hugh been over to-day?’

‘No, sir. His sister has but just this minute gone.’

‘Oh, has she been? Did she walk over the moor?’

‘And wouldn’t think much of it, I’ll be bound,’ interposed the vicar, smiling.

‘I dinna think she would, sir,’ said the man.

‘She didn’t suggest anything, Laidler?’

‘No, sir: thought it looked varry weel.’

‘Stay and finish to-night.’

‘Varry good, sir.’

‘You make an excellent squire, Paul,’ said Mr. Crook, as they were again riding homewards.

‘I am glad you think so. But I shall not always be my own agent, you know.

I am so in this case, because I am particularly fond of Hugh.'

'Curious that Miss Maisie should decamp in that way,' remarked the clergyman, determined to broach the matter which he knew they were both thinking about. 'I should hardly have thought that she was nervous.'

'Nervous! Not she. It's pride. She's prouder than a duchess. She hates us, I know, for giving Hugh a shepherd's place. But what else could he do? He told me that he had lost money every year at Southernknowe since his father died. Only his honesty prevents him going on to bankruptcy.'

'But why can't he get on?'

'My dear fellow, you know that well enough,' said Paul, laughing. 'Not humdrum enough, to put it mildly.'

‘H’m!—won’t go on to bankruptcy, you say?’

‘No. He says he can now pay every penny he owes; but next year he couldn’t. So he stops immediately.’

‘Ha! Remarkable sensibility for these days.’

‘I think so. I believe his sister resents the sacrifice of an independent position, and certainly detests the household that has offered the service.’

‘Not unnatural, I suppose,’ commented the vicar. ‘You think, then, that mere antipathy led her to avoid us?’

‘Such is my supposition. She used to be rather noticeably polite, but, since Hugh’s acceptance of this place, upon my word she has been barely civil.’

‘H’m—ha!’



Therewith both horses were urged to a trot.

Mr. Crook saw no reason to mention what he had seen by the burn, for it did not affect the soundness of Paul's supposition, and it did not suggest itself to the clergyman as a matter for mere idle conversation. He himself pondered its various aspects on his homeward journey.

They kept to the cart-track all the way; a road more circuitous, but which made the descent into the valley of High Feldom by a more gradual incline; avoiding the rugged ground in the neighbourhood of the Dour Lough by skirting the outer extremity of the fir-wood. This road also would bring them down very near to Mr. Crook's vicarage, which was pitched at some distance from the village, and a call at which

he had stated to be necessary in the face of an invitation he had accepted from Paul to dinner in the evening.

When they reached this point, they separated, and the clergyman went up to his own house. In the absence of his one youthful factotum he rode round to the yard and stabled his steed himself.

Mr. Crook had no wife or child to greet him, so that there was an impressive silence, if not gloom, about the house as he entered it. Doubtless, it was unnoticed by himself, for his features, which were ordinarily so vivacious, now bore a peculiar expression, which betokened thought, but which very greatly resembled fierceness. He crossed over the hall to his study and shut himself in.

He took from a drawer in a bureau what seemed to be a large sheet of drawing

paper, and proceeded to pin it to a board which stood upon an easel in one corner of the room. When spread out there, a face in chalk was seen upon the paper, and this the gentleman fixedly regarded. Presently he touched it here and there, adding a line or a bit of shading, and then drawing back, head aside, in the most approved manner. Occasionally he stared vacantly into the space of the room, as though his model was there visible before him, and then returned eagerly to his paper.

Perhaps for half-an-hour he was thus engaged, when a singularly youthful smile began to dispel the former unwonted fierceness, and he sat down in a chair to regard placidly the result of his handiwork.

At this moment there was an attractiveness about the little man's demeanour, which mere physical deficiencies in no way

impaired. He was not a young man, but how far on either side of forty could not have been easily determined. The clear eyes, and rather thin, firmly-set lips gave a vivacity of expression, indicating the hey-day of intellectual activity with not a little of the optimistic outlook of youth; whilst creases in the forehead, positive wrinkles about the eyes, and ridges between the cheeks and nostrils betrayed unmistakable maturity of days. The upper lip was shaven, and the beard scant, inclining naturally to a peak. The hair, too, was thin upon the forehead, but abundant at the sides where it curled upwards over the ears.

As the smile was beginning to fade, and to be replaced by an eager gaze,—a gaze of anxious, doubtful enquiry which brought out too prominently all the oldest attri-

butes of the features,—the vicar jumped from his chair with a ‘Bah!’ and went to unpin the drawing. The tissue paper was again laid over it, and the whole replaced in the drawer. Then he withdrew to dress for dinner.

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE FLITTING.

THERE was wind enough up above, whistling in the stunted thorn-trees which were exposed there, and making white partings in the long fleeces of the mountain sheep grazing near the summit; but in the bottom of the defile the air was still. There only the constant brawling of the burn disturbed the mountain quietude, with the occasional voice of a restless sheep or of ashy moorland bird. The day had been stormy, but now in the afternoon the heavy clouds were

breaking in the zenith and showing fringes of a tawny lining behind the sullen grey. The season was a late one, hence, June though it was, plenty of snow lingered in the sunless chasms and recesses of the hills.

In the shelter of this secluded valley, standing upon a suitable foothold just above the bed of the stream, was a shepherd's house. It was a well-built structure of moorland stone, darkened by long exposure to varied elements, but rendered conspicuous by its roof of red tiles. The piece of ground before it, sloping to the burn, had been cultivated as a flower-garden, but was wild and disorderly now; whilst behind was a larger patch, similarly untidy, containing a few hardy spring vegetables with currant bushes round the walls. A long low stack of peat, re-

sembling a pile of blackened bricks, lay at right angles to one end of the house, and beyond it the remains of a rick of dry brown bracken thatched with rushes, in the bed of which a collie dog lay comfortably snoozing. In the near corner of a green croft adjoining, reclaimed from and stretching half-way up the steep slope of grey bent, were a few farm implements, such as a turnip-cutter, a couple of heavy carts with customary gear, and some other smaller things, arranged apparently with a view to 'lots' rather than to any appropriate use in the work of the homestead.

Even in such a situation, a human dwelling admits of degrees in the dreariness of its appearance, and to-day the aspect of Southernknowe was unusually forlorn. But for the dog and the streak of smoke from a chimney, with the accompanying



incense-like fragrance of burning peat which pervaded the valley, there might have been some preliminary doubt as to the place being still inhabited. Presently, such doubt was effectually dispelled, for the door opened, and, as a young woman appeared with a bucket in her hand, the sound of uproarious voices was audible through the doorway. The girl walked down to the stream, and, leaning with one hand upon the overhanging branch of alder, plunged her pail into the water and returned with her burden to the house. The dog, taking advantage of the open doorway, had entered before her, and again it was closed, and the voices hushed.

Hushed only from without: inside the noise proceeded undiminished. As the young woman passed through to a small kitchen at the back, one of the men who

were at the table turned round, and, without speaking, dipped a jug into her bucket. He glanced significantly into the girl's face before taking his seat, but she passed on without perceptible response.

‘Well, here’s success to ye again, Hughie,’ exclaimed one voice over the rest, as the speaker raised his tumbler for a draught; ‘but damn me if there’s any chance for the shepherds i’ this countryside in these days.’

‘That’s ower true, Sandie,’ said another. ‘It’s little better nor slavery. I wish I’d served my time to something that I could ha’ gone to wi’ my coat on. It’s they that make the money.’

‘Of course it is, man. But ye’ll no mend it so lang as ye’ve got kings and lords and a’ thae cattle among ye,’ interposed an

elderly man, who had hitherto been for the most part silent. 'Ye can ken that nicely frae langsyne affairs. What answer gat the Jews when they demanded a king, eh?'

'I ken naething about the Jews,' replied the original speaker, impatiently; 'but ye'se right eneugh, Isaac, i' your arguments about thae lords. They divide the haill country-side amongst 'em till there's ne'er an acre for a poor man, and what rightly belongs to the poor they'll rob 'em of it. Ye'll mind 'em taking the Gowanburn Common frae us?'

'Ay, ay, clean robbery a'thegither. Whunstane got a good hantle o' that an' a', and just look you what he had a'ready. His mairch begins at the Blakehope Mains and runs a' the way down to the head of

Rede water, and God only kens how far he gangs i' the tither airt. Like a kingdom o' itself, ye ken !

‘It is, Isaac ; it is.’

‘It canna last, I tell ye ; it canna last,’ asserted the elder, with dogmatic emphasis.

‘What says the prophet now?’ asked the young man who sat at the head of the table, and who as he spoke turned towards Isaac from a discussion with two others on the opposite side. His face was flushed with animation, and an ironical smile seemed to play about his features. All his companions at once sat back in their chairs silent, and their faces brightened at the prospect of amusement.

‘I say what is no that easily gainsaid, Hughie, my man,’ replied Isaac, with dignified composure. ‘Thae reiving lairds wha hae caused ye to displenish this stead

o' Southernknowe and tak service wi' 'em as a herd, maun cease their reiving. The warld's ower auld for a continuance of the like o' that. Gie every man his ain again, that's what I say.'

'Your ain is what you can get, in this world, Isaac,' suggested Hugh, jocularly.

'In the deil's warld, sure enough; but anither yane cometh,' Isaac responded, more fervently than the company had expected. 'It canna be lang the noo. Something is to befall the muckle beast and his image. You may live to see the pouring out o' the first vial, my lads. My sartie! It wad astonish ye, I'se warr'nd,' continued the enthusiast, aroused from his usual reticence by the good cheer of which he had been a partaker; 'it would astonish ye, nae doubt, to see the angel come the morrow's morn in a char-

ryot on the clouds and blow the trumpet with a tarr'ble sound. How many would be ready ?'

'It'll no come in our time,' replied Hugh, with his calm smile, unmoved by the energy and eager gaze of his friend.

'I winna say it, man; I winna say it,' exclaimed the old man, shaking his head, earnestly.

The young woman in the inner room, interested by the turn in the conversation, came and stood in the doorway to listen. She fixed her eyes upon him whom they called the prophet, disregarding all the rest.

'How do ye come at it, Isaac?' interposed another speaker.

'Come at it! Out of the prophecies, o' course. The word o' the Lord was "Precept upon precept, precept upon

precept ; line upon line, line upon line ; here a little and there a little." To show the meaning of this verse and to understand it, we have to class up the prophets and Revelation o' the New Testament which open, as it were with keys, this tarr'ble mystery. When the curses fell upon Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came and carried away Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into Babylon. This is the beginning of the curses and the mystery.'

Shrieks of laughter greeted this untimely disclosure of such abstruse mysteries. But the young man they called Hugh, apparently of some pre-eminence amongst them, raised his voice immediately above the noise, and in an angry tone commanded silence.

'Haud your din !' he shouted. 'Dinna heed 'em, Isaac ; dinna heed 'em.'

‘Heed ’em, hinny?’ said the old man, with a calm, disdainful smile. ‘Like the crackling o’ thorns under the pot.’

Therewith he took his glass up from the bench in the fire-place and raised it to his lips. Hugh at the moment kicked his companions under the table, and shook his head at them deprecatingly.

‘I canna get hold of it,’ he then said, turning towards Isaac in a conciliatory manner. ‘What for should they be so obscurely revealed?’

‘Why, man, the Israelites were darkened because of their disobedience. It was no to be revealed to them, ye ken. But, look you, the understanding of the subject of thae prophecies is just like the A B C. That would appear difficult enough when you first came to it. And yet nobody has hit it,’ he proceeded, smiling complacently.



‘Even Baxter is clean out of it entire-ly a’thegither. It’s a’ i’ the numbers, Hughie ; it’s a’ i’ the numbers.’

It was obviously with difficulty that even Hugh kept his countenance.

‘The number o’ the beast is six hundred sixty and six, ye ken. These are prophetic years. The number of the beast, or the number of his name, is the number of a man. The man or image was made up twenty-one years before Christ. His name was Death until six hundred and thirty-seven years after Christ, when the fause prophet, or twa-hornit beast, or priest, set him up to be worshipped ; that was the beginning o’ the second period.’

Again self-control became impossible, and all joined in an uproarious outburst of laughter.

‘And ye think the end is at hand, Isaac?’ cried somebody, derisively.

‘I canna doubt on ’t. If you would but gie your minds to the study of thae things, ye’d ken it nicely an’ a’.’

‘And wad the study o’ that gowk’s tale help us to get back wor ain, Isaac, frae the reiving landlords?’

‘Aiblins it might, man.’

‘I’ll no believe that anyhow. They’ll need mair nor preaching afore they slacken their neives, I can tell ye.’

‘What for should they slacken them?’ interposed Hugh, rather fiercely.

‘Ye’ve best cause to ken that, I should think,’ replied the discontented one, with a grin.

‘I’ve no cause at all. It’s no through them that I have to sell up my pickle

stock. If I canna pay my debts without, who's to blame but mysel'?'

‘What's your biggest debt?’

‘Rent, of course.’

‘O’ course,’ was raised in derisive chorus, the inference being obvious to all.

‘And would you have another man's land and pay nothing for the use of it?’ cried Hugh.

‘Of course we would.’

‘Then what the devil do you talk about reiving for?’ shouted Hugh, scornfully. ‘Ye're the reivers, if that's your doctrine. The land belongs to them as much as your watches belong to you. What would you say to Squire Whinstone if he came to one of you and demanded your watch because he hadn't got one and wanted to wear it?’

‘ Knock him down, daur say,’ interposed a humorous one.

‘ But there’s a difference,’ cried another, more soberly.

‘ There’s no difference at all,’ replied Hugh. ‘ Who’s keeping you out of the land? There’s plenty of land for you, if you want to buy it. If you want it, make money and buy it ; if you don’t, don’t talk any damned nonsense about being kept out of it. The world’s in your own hands, I tell ye. Many a man with a worse start than any of you has owned his thousand acres afore he’d done ; but he didna set to work like a pickpocket, and then swear that a’ the world was robbing him.’

The company was too hilarious for logical arguments, so that only laughter greeted this sally.

‘ Go ahead, Hughie !’ cried one. ‘ Ye’ll

be a squire yoursel' one day, I'se warrant ye.'

'I'll never be a squire,' retorted the leader; 'but I'll never curse other folk for what I ken to be my own fault.'

Isaac had relapsed into silence, but his eyes were fixed upon his young friend with obvious interest. The young woman too had watched him from the inner doorway where she stood, and, now that there was a pause, she said,

'It is five o'clock, Hugh;' and again disappeared.

'Ay, ay, lass, it's time to move,' he exclaimed, rising from his chair; 'but the carts are no here, are they?'

'Is Whinstone gaun to send his carts the night?'

'Ay, certainly.'

'Then come awa' and hae the louping,'

cried one. 'Ye took the bet, Hughie, ye canna——'

'Haud awa', man! Do ye think I'll no keep it? Come along, Isaac, and be the judge for us.'

There was a scuffling of feet and thrusting back of chairs on the stone floor as the men rose to go out. Six of them trooped from the open doorway, and, talking loudly, made their way down to the burn side.

It was brighter now, and the sun smote the upper half of one side of the pass, giving to the grey herbage a golden hue, which intensified the shade in the bed of the valley. The voice of the cuckoo was clearly audible, and the long resonant whistle of the curlew came from the higher lands like the cry of a wailing spirit; but the confusion of human voices which re-

echoed through the stillness broke the solemnity of the situation. The men were taking their way up the side of the stream, in amongst the alder and birch-trees which grew by the margin, to the spot fixed upon for the athletic contest. It was not more than fifty yards from the house, at a point where great rocks hemmed in the angry water, now swollen and discoloured by the recent rain. It tumbled through the cleft,—a straight, natural wall on each side from fifteen to twenty feet high, with tufts of fern, heather, or whortleberry in any crevice that would hold them. From the face of one side also, about two feet from the top, grew a young mountain ash-tree, which overhung the chasm, turning upwards to the light with a main stem of the thickness of a wrist. Just over this were the six men now standing, and

the one who had offered the challenge was pointing out with volubility the feat which was to decide their relative prowess. Shortly, it consisted in a leap into the open space before them in order to clutch, as if it were a trapeze, the rowan bough referred to, and then with a swing to alight upon a small space of shingle below under the rock on the opposite side of the water.

The challenge was again formally accepted, a crown being the amount of forfeit by such one as should fail to acquit himself to the satisfaction of Isaac Outchester. A coin was tossed, and as Hugh won he elected to be the first to take the leap. He flung off his hat, coat, and waistcoat, and stood by the edge to take his plunge. The other five stood round expectant, when there was a temporary



interruption owing to the arrival of an unexpected addition to their number.

When the house was silent and the men's voices could be heard growing fainter out-of-doors, the young woman, who had been busy within, emerged from her seclusion. The room was redolent of spirits and tobacco, and upon the table, scattered in confusion, lay the remains of a rude feast. The girl stood with her hand upon the high back of an old settle to regard for a moment the spectacle before her. Her face was noticeably comely, but at this instant it was overclouded by an angry frown. She was tall and well-made, inclining perhaps to a too obvious muscularity to satisfy the requirements of ideal womanly grace, but displaying a rude majesty, nevertheless, which

imparted a natural dignity to her unpolished surroundings.

As she stepped forward to sweep the indications of the revelry from the table, there was another movement in the room, and turning quickly round she faced a man who was sitting in one corner of the settle. He gave a smile in return for her angry glance, but did not attempt to break the silence.

‘What are you here for?’ she said, wrathfully. ‘What for did you no go along with the others?’

‘I didna care to go.’

‘Too drunk to go, I suppose you mean,’ replied the maiden, in scorn.

‘I am no drunk, Maisie, you canna say it of me. Ye never saw me drunk.’

‘Not at your own expense, certainly; but I’ll warrant you’ve been drunk times

enough when others have had to pay for the liquor.'

The girl went with her hands full to the inner room, and presently returned.

'What are ye angry about, my lass?' said the youth, in a tone meant to be soothing. 'Do you no like leaving the Southernknowe?'

'What for should I like the place? It has no brought me so much good.'

'That's ower true, I doubt. But look here, Maisie, dinna be so spicy, for I stayed behind to speak a word or two wi' you, and it's ill talking to a fractious woman.'

He had risen from his seat as he spoke, and stepped towards the girl, who was by the table.

'I don't want you to speak to me,' she said, ill-humouredly.

‘Now do, my dear lassie,’ replied the youth, touching her arm in an attempt to take her hand.

‘Don’t make a fool of yourself,’ was the still angry rejoinder, but uttered in an undertone. ‘Look there!’

The man looked, and, upon seeing a young gentleman enter the doorway, he stepped back and felt sheepish.

‘Pray excuse me, Miss Winlaw,’ said Paul Whinstone, with a smile. ‘Is Hugh anywhere about?’

The girl informed him of her brother’s whereabouts, with but small pretence at graciousness, and, with an expression of thanks, the visitor withdrew.

‘Go with him,’ muttered Maisie to her original companion. ‘I dinna want you here.’

‘Not I. What’s he come interfering

about? Auld Isaac's right,' he continued, in a tone of displeasure; 'they're no better than a set of thieves.'

The young woman went about her occupations in silence, not noticing the man's presence, and paying little heed to his muttered discontent against rich people in general. He continued standing, watching Maisie's movements, or rather the moving girl herself, with the closest interest. When she was taking the last things from the table, he again approached her, and laid one hand upon her broad shoulder. She stopped, leaning forward with both hands on the table, and turned her face round towards him.

'Well?' she said.

The man displayed no obvious signs of cultivation in his general demeanour, but in his movements towards the

girl there was a natural tenderness which bespoke at least some civilizing depth of genuine feeling.

‘Do you no care for me at all, Maisie?’

‘I don’t know that I do.’

‘Will you at least tell me, then, if you care for anybody else more?’

‘I don’t know that I do.’

He let his hand glide down her arm, so as to take her hand. She seemed neither to assent nor dissent, but stood simply passive, only moving her face to turn it away from him.

‘Do tell me, my bonnie lass, if that’s quite true,’ he said, earnestly.

‘I will when you tell me what right you have to ask me sic a question.’

‘Right enough; for I love you mair than anybody else can do. Doesna that

give me the right to ask how I stand wi' you ?'

'How you stand wi' me, yes ; and I hae told you.'

Then she took her hand from him, and went again to the little back room, saying as she did so,

'I hear the carts outby, man.'

The youth took up his hat and went to look. Maisie was right, the first cart was just crossing the ford by the ash-tree at a short distance below the house.

'Go and tell Hugh,' cried the girl, from inside. 'We shall no get away to-night.'

The man did as he was bidden, and set off up the burn.

When Hugh was about to leap, he turned and saw close beside him the visi-

tor whom Maisie had directed, with such marked displeasure, to the spot. Mr. Whinstone, clad in his mouse-coloured riding-breeches and gaiters, and blue serge jacket, offered a striking contrast to the company which he had come amongst. He nodded affably to all, and received a civil greeting in return.

‘What’s going on, Hugh?’ he said, peering into the chasm before him.

The fact was briefly explained to him.

‘I’ll give you half-a-sovereign if you can do it,’ he then said, with a proper sportsmanlike relish of the situation.

Hugh smiled, and went again to the brink. He leapt, and clutched the bough easily, which swayed with the weight and caused the leaves to rustle; then, with the swing which the impetus of his leap had given him, he left the tree and alighted



gracefully upon the patch of shingle below, touching a sprig of broom which grew from the rock before him, in order to save himself from falling backwards.

Shouts of course greeted the accomplishment, and Hugh scrambled along the rocky margin to cross the stream lower down. When he rejoined his companions, there was vociferous congratulation, and the young gentleman who had offered the extra prize immediately produced his cash.

‘Will ye give me one, sir?’ asked the original challenger of the contest, who now stood ready to take his turn at the trial.

‘Certainly, if you do it as well.’

All again watched whilst this one took the leap. He leant forward, and had safely clutched the tree; but apparently, from having thrown himself with too much force, his feet swung forwards, altogether

beyond his control. His grip, however, was certain, and, if he had but waited for a second swing, all would have been well. Instead of doing so, the man leapt when his body had begun the backward swing, and he was thus unable to make any kind of calculation. The consequences were slight enough, as regarded his personal safety, if not his personal pride. He dropped about a foot short of the piece of appointed shingle, and stood for a second up to his knees in the eddying foam. The derisive laughter was audible to him above the roaring of the water, and he returned to the throng in a very crestfallen plight.

‘It was a good jump,’ cried Paul, loudly, above the bantering laughter and remarks, ‘and it’s all very well for you fellows to jeer at him when you’re not willing to make a try at it at all.’

‘Are ye yoursel’, sir?’ cried one of the assembly.

‘Hang it, that I am,’ was the immediate reply.

‘No, no, sir,’ interposed Hugh, with decision.

But Whinstone disregarded the opposition, and had already divested himself of his coat and waistcoat.

‘Mind nothing falls out of the pockets, Hugh,’ he said, as he handed the things to young Winlaw, and forthwith he advanced to the edge of the rock. His action was received with uproarious approbation.

The fellow looked agile enough, and there was no reason in the world why he should not acquit himself as well even as Hugh himself. He paused a few seconds on the brink, as if calculating the dis-

tances to allow for; then, with a graceful plunge, almost a dive it seemed, he had taken it amidst the breathless gaze of the spectators.

Curiously enough, he had made the very same initial mistake as his predecessor, but with different result.

‘Take a second swing, sir,’ bawled Hugh, seeing immediately the predicament; ‘take a second swing.’

Whether Whinstone heard him or not he acted upon the suggestion, and kept a firm grip of the bough until he had swung once again backwards. He had commenced the return, and was looking eagerly below him to judge the right moment for the drop, when an unexpected casualty befel him. He must have been exactly at the perpendicular, at the very point at which he must let go, when

a slight crackling was audible, and Hugh exclaimed, with terrible emphasis,

‘ By G—, the tree has given !’

The rootlets had been wrenched from their crevice, and the main stem had given way. It was not severed, for, at the first crack, Paul had let go his hold, and, unable to control his movements, had tumbled on his back into the foaming stream.

Fortunately, he fell into the midst of the current, where the water was deep and free from rocks ; but the force of it was such that, in a few seconds, he must inevitably be hurled against the boulder which parted the water in mid-stream. Hugh had instantly seen this, and was in readiness at the spot. Many a sheep had he saved in his lifetime from precisely the same predicament.

Leaning forward, with a stout walking-stick to aid him, he had spanned, in a prodigious stride, the current which swept between the two rocks. The figure came rolling up to him, the white shirt conspicuous amongst the foaming water, and with one stroke Hugh had got it firmly against the rock with the head thrust upwards from the current. Seizing one arm he raised it, so as to get a good grip beneath the shoulders, and with putting forth all his strength he flung the body into the arms of somebody nearest to the bank.

In greatest excitement all flocked down the burn. One held Paul's feet, whilst Winlaw himself supported him by the shoulders, and then at a run he was borne to the house.

The young woman, having already heard the stampede, stared in amazement as they entered the doorway, and laid their burden on the floor. But, at a movement from her brother, she was instantly at Paul's head, and Hugh himself was up to turn every onlooker out of doors.

‘He’s all right,’ he shouted; ‘he’ll be round in a minute.’

Hugh seemed learned in the methods of resuscitation. A pillow was placed beneath Whinstone’s chest, and Hugh, kneeling by him, drew his tongue forward between the lips. Maisie stood silently over them, with one hand resting upon the table and her eyes fixed upon the motionless figure. Very soon breath was audibly drawn.

‘A drop of warm brandy-and-water, Maisie lass,’ remarked Hugh, composedly. ‘He’s none the worse.’

Whinstone moved apparently at the sound of the voice.

‘Do you feel better, sir?’

But there was no reply.

Presently a deep sigh was drawn, and Paul tried to look about him. There stood the young woman at the corner of the table, with a tumbler in her hand, and upon her his eyes rested. There was a long, silent scrutiny of her features, as if to gather his scattered senses, and then Paul exclaimed,

‘What the deuce——’

But his sentence was left unfinished. His eyes were turned to Hugh’s face, and that appeared to give him the clue he was in need of.



‘That cursed tree failed me, Hugh.’

‘That was it, sir. You took it too far out. I forgot to mention it. But never heed. Lie quiet for a few minutes.’

‘I suppose I did.’

‘Have a drop of brandy, sir, and you’ll be none the worse,’ said Hugh, taking the glass from his sister’s hand.

‘Thank you. I’m sorry to give you such a lot of trouble.’

This remark was really addressed to Maisie, but she withdrew without making any reply.

When Paul was clad in such garments as the shepherd could lend him, at the young gentleman’s own request the general company was admitted, and then about half-an-hour was spent in animated if incoherent conversation. Paul naturally was

the object of extreme interest, and all eyes were fixed upon him so long as the conversation continued. His head rested upon his hand, and there was an unusually subdued look about him, but that soon began to wear off. The whole affair was taken by him with unlimited good-humour, and he joked with them readily about it.

‘I have hindered you, Hugh,’ he said at last. ‘I only came to see if there was anything we could do, and little thought of your giving me a ducking for my pains. Do tell me if there is.’

‘There is nothing, thank you, sir. The carts have come, so we’ve but to pack our wee bit furniture and away to Braidstruther. It won’t take us more than a couple of hours, so we shall be there soon after eight.’

At these sounds of movement, Hugh's sister again appeared in the room, and towards her Paul immediately turned.

‘I hope you'll like the place, Miss Winlaw,’ he said, ‘and I am sure you'll excuse my unfortunate interruption. Do accept my heartiest thanks for your kindness.’

He held out his hand to her as he finished. She took it and looked up at him.

‘Thank you, sir,’ was all she said.

There was a general adieu, more genially responded to than upon his arrival, and Paul went to mount his horse, which was fastened outside. All watched him descend the burn until he reached the ford; then, as the alder-trees fringing the water hid horse and rider from their view, they turned again into the house.

Hugh was busy inside collecting the

furniture, and, as his companions trooped in to him, he bade all lay hands to the work or else take their departure. All were ready enough to give their assistance, and very speedily chairs and tables, pots and pans, were removed from their appropriate seclusion in the house to be ruthlessly exposed to the cold glare of the open sky. The work did not interfere with conversation; so that, whilst hands were busy, tongues were equally, or more so. It was observable that the voices of Hugh Winlaw and his sister were but seldom heard; when they did speak it was only to give some necessary instructions to their assistants or to each other.

Mr. Paul Whinstone was well enough known in the district, although this was the first direct personal intercourse that most of

the present assembly had had with him. It was natural, therefore, that the young gentleman should form the main topic of conversation under present circumstances. There were individual conclusions to compare, preconceived notions to dispel, after the interesting presentment they had all just had of him. Some cynically discounted his assumed geniality; some accepted it as indicative of something better than they had expected to find in him; but all agreed that he had shown himself no fool in undertaking the adventure which had ended so unfortunately for himself.

Maisie Winlaw's lover hovered again about her, but was able to command very scant recognition at her hands. For whatever reason, she was in worse humour than when he had tackled her before; but when left alone unpleasant thought, rather

than positive ill-temper, seemed to be the expression of her features. She set doggedly to her work, seeking and encouraging intercourse with nobody, plainly if silently asking merely to be let alone.

For about an hour were they all engaged in this occupation, and then the whole of Hugh's household possessions lay securely packed in the two carts. Twice did the young man himself, and twice did his sister, separately, go throughout the house to see if anything had been left, each time returning empty-handed. The girl went last, and, as she passed through the empty rooms upstairs, her brother was standing upon the threshold below, ostensibly listening to the remarks of his garrulous companions, but in his soul following the footsteps of his sister above, as they re-echoed through the hollow, dismantled

dwelling. When he heard her step upon the stairs, he called out,

‘Are you ready, Maisie lass?’

‘Yes, Hughie,’ she replied, using, as her brother noticed, for the first time for many months, his old boyish appellation.

‘Will you ride? There’s plenty of room.’

‘No, I will walk.’

‘Go ahead then, James,’ cried Hugh to the carter, and immediately the heavy rumbling of the wheels broke the awful stillness of the secluded valley.

‘Good luck to you, my lad,’ came in chorus from his companions, as they all stood to watch the young shepherd depart on his hillward journey.

‘The same to all of you,’ he cried, as he turned away with old Isaac who was to accompany him as far as their road lay in common.

And so the procession began. Maisie was in advance, some little way behind the carts, she preferring to walk alone. Hugh, with his dog at his heels, and Isaac brought up the rear at about the same distance behind the girl. The cart-track lay up the valley, ascending presently the bare slope by a gradual slant until it reached the top where it struck over the open moor.

The incessant brawling of the water was ever audible, but that sound only intensified the stillness of the locality. The creaking and the rumbling of the carts resounded from end to end of the defile, seeming scarcely fainter to the clump of youths who stood watching its progress from the empty house, now that it was nearing the summit, than it had done when close beside them.

One of the men gazed with peculiar



eagerness as the figures emerged upon the patch of sunlight, near the top of the ridge. The carts were nearing the summit; now standing in clearest outline against the sky, the horses' manes visibly ruffled by the wind; and now had disappeared beyond. The young woman, in her turn, advanced, her moving shadow clearly perceptible on the bald hill-side, she too against the sky for a moment, and then gone. Despite this particular watcher's vigorous waving of his handkerchief, she had given no backward glance. Hugh and Isaac were better mannered; as they neared the summit they turned and stood. A vociferous halloo rose to them from their friends below, and with a responsive flourish of their sticks they too advanced and disappeared.

‘ You'll never get that lass, George,’ remarked one who had observed the lover's

movements and disappointment. 'So dinna think it.'

The man made no reply, but turned with the rest to take the path down the valley.

When that enclosing ridge was surmounted, the prospect was a wide one. Hill upon hill, in all their barren solemnity, stretched upon all sides as far as the eye could reach, the whole scene aglow now in the clear evening sunlight. The wind had sunk considerably, but it was cool and brisk enough still at this altitude. The orb of flaming gold was sinking towards the north-west, having just emerged from behind a long, narrow bar of deep blue cloud which spanned the whole of the western sky. Between it and the hills

below was a sea of golden light, showing hill-tops as islands in its midst, but only vaguely distinguishable in the dazzling glow. Up above was a glorious broken sky,—the compact horizontal slips of shuttle-shaped clouds, which stretched like many-coloured wreaths of sand upon a smooth, cold ocean, were overlapped by the lower rack of grey, the loose fringes of which were suffused with the golden sunlight right upwards across the zenith.

When Isaac left him, Hugh still walked on behind alone. Unlike his sister, though, whose eyes were seldom moved from the ground before her, he looked intelligently about him, receiving apparently some definite impression from the sombre surroundings, if one not wholly of joyful exhilaration. He watched, with obvious

interest, the curlews which flew around them, seeming actually to relish their doleful cry of alarm, so persistently reiterated, a sound which to his sister gave but audible and appropriate expression to the silent weight brooding over her own spirits. The bent had now given place to a wide expanse of dull, green heather, amidst which were visible bare black patches from which all signs of vegetation had recently been burnt. A crag or a cairn could be seen on some of the hill-tops, here and there a circular wall shelter for the sheep, and on some distant slope a fir plantation ; but for the rest nothing but bald undulations, dotted in places with sheep, displaying no vestige of cultivation or other sign of the presence of man.

For nearly two hours were they traversing this wilderness, until at last, in the

twilight, they reached a dark, solitary house, standing apparently in the open moor, with a clump of fir-trees at one end; and here they stopped.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## CLERICAL DIVERSIONS.

MR. CROOK was not long in carrying out his threat of paying his respects to his friends at the Peel. He was received with favour, spent a pleasant half-hour's chat with the ladies, and withdrew in exuberant spirits.

Nor was Mrs. Monk more slow in returning the compliment. Scarcity of neighbours permitted a considerable relaxation of such strict etiquette as is found necessary amongst a more busy and popu-

lous community. When the ladies invaded his quiet parsonage, Mr. Crook very easily inveigled them into a cup of afternoon tea. The clergyman was in highest feather, and, whilst he conversed vivaciously with his visitors, he was seldom still. If for a moment he was so, of course he stood facing them from the hearth-rug.

There had been a pause, during which Clare's replacing her tea-cup in its saucer, within the house, and the piping of tom-tits, coupled with the restful mutterings of poultry out of doors, were the only sounds.

'Life goes smoothly with you here, Mr. Crook,' observed Clare, looking idly towards the open window.

'As in the golden age,' replied the vicar, smiling. 'But it suits me. I never had the aggressive temperament, Miss Lang-

toft. I endeavour not completely to fossilise, though. I get my *Times* by post a day and a half late ; by Mrs. Whinstone's kindness I see the principal reviews and magazines ; twice a year I spend a fortnight in London ; I attend the Royal Agricultural Show whenever it is held to the north of Derby ; occasionally visit Newcastle. For the rest, I am mostly to be found within the boundaries of my own parish. An ignoble acquiescence, I fear Mrs. Monk thinks,' he concluded, with a laugh, as he turned towards that lady.

'Indeed, by no means,' exclaimed she. 'Rather a happy and enviable survival, Mr. Crook. Your spirit of complacency belongs to a former time, and I assure you I envy it with all my heart.'

'You speak as if within your own boundaries you were idle,' said Clare.



‘The less said of that the better, Miss Langtoft,’ he replied, with a shrug.

‘I think not, but I must not flatter you. But I shall want to talk more about it if we stay here for any length of time.’

‘You will stay with us some time, Mrs. Monk?’ asked the clergyman, eagerly.

‘In all probability.’

‘Ha, now, that is kind! Have no fear of winter on this side Christmas. Autumn is very kind to us, no doubt to make up for her shabby sister spring. The moorlands in an October or November wind are not to be surpassed, that is, for expression of their own peculiar spirit. Certain days of March and April, when the curlew first comes up to us, but of course in many main characteristics spring and autumn are very similar.’

‘You will have to entertain us, Mr.

Crook, if you persuade us to stay. Mr. Whinstone promises to instruct us in some of the local practical accomplishments, you must undertake the poetical.'

'You know too well that my poor services are at instant command. Can we not devise a play extempore, so to speak? Some rational means of mutual entertainment. I have little doubt of it. Mrs. Whinstone would be overjoyed at such a project.'

'Certainly we might,' assented Clare. 'But I was just then thinking of some of your more personal methods. I want to study the moorland spirit—some of the constituent causes, I mean, which go to make up its peculiar effect. Analyse the cry of the curlew, for instance; fathom the dark waters of the lough; learn the message of the wind from the fells.'

‘I shall be but a diffident guide to you, Miss Langtoft,’ observed the little man, modestly.

‘I am sure you ought not to be. I have not forgotten your delightful portfolios.’

‘You are very much too indulgent. The slightest development of the faculty of draughtsmanship, I do assure you. I practise it purely for trivial purposes. I like thus to preserve any little scene or incident which takes my fancy, just for my own idle amusement. But I will admit I have taken a little trouble over the birds this spring. They may give you some amusement. Excuse me.’

Mr. Crook withdrew, and returned with a small portfolio in his hand. He took a chair and planted himself by the side of the younger lady.

‘I have felt some dissatisfaction with the ordinary scientific treatment of birds,’ began the vicar, as he untied the silk strings of the case upon his knees. ‘Isn’t it Thoreau that likens nature to Medusa’s head in its effect upon the scientific beholder? It seems to me very apt. I advocate education through the sentiment rather than through the cold material. With this idea—(don’t think I claim any originality for it, of course,) with this idea I have tried to treat pictorially some of our moorland birds, just for the use of the children in our village school here.’

Now that Mr. Crook had got fairly mounted, it was difficult to say when he would draw in the rein. His features were set in an enthusiastic earnestness.

‘Delightful!’ exclaimed Clare.

‘It must have occurred to you, Mrs.

Monk, to note the remarkable adaptation of birds to their natural surroundings. Evolution, Darwinism, you think? Yes, but for the moment I speak entirely in, let us call it, a spiritual sense. I mean, the birds' spiritual harmony with the spirit of their habitat. They always appear to me the audible expression of that spirit. Hear a curlew or a plover on the moorland, a snipe or a bittern in the marshes, or a sea-gull on the cliffs. You need not see the bird. You feel instinctively that its voice is the voice of the locality. I have tried to illustrate something of this in such modest media as I have at my command. Naturally I have made but little as yet of my efforts.'

As Mr. Crook spoke, he had taken the first of his sketches from the portfolio, and now held it up for their inspection. It

was a water-colour drawing, not claiming to be of genius, but at least of extremely conscientious workmanship, and in the lower corner was scribbled, 'Wild Duck.'

It was a representation of the Dour Lough, with its gloomy surroundings and sullen face, and from the rushy marshland, which encroached upon the water at one end, a bird was in the act of emerging, two others were in rapid flight before it. The sombre impression of the wild duck's haunt was undoubtedly well interpreted, with no little artistic insight, and Clare looked fixedly at the drawing. Mrs. Monk, in looking towards it, had cast a glance at the open portfolio, and for some reason her eyes lingered there. The clergyman perceived it, and looked down also; instantly his colour altered, and he showed a momentary confusion. It was all so

momentary that Clare, who still regarded the first picture, did not perceive it. Mr. Crook looked at the elder lady with a smile, and said,

‘We will look at that directly.’

Clare disregarded the remark, and entered into a criticism of the sketch she had been examining. The vicar paid polite attention to her, but showed less enthusiasm in his subject. To the young lady he appeared nervous, and she naturally attributed it to a modest disposition, although she had not detected such sensitiveness in him before. Mrs. Monk seemed quite ignorant of the effect her innocent glance had occasioned.

‘I had no idea that this next scrap was here at all,’ said Mr. Crook, turning again to the portfolio; ‘but, as Mrs. Monk observed it, we will look at it. It is un-

finished, and too crude for examination. But the subject is a good one.'

'Oh, a rare bird!' exclaimed Clare, facetiously. 'Why, I know it, surely.'

'Do you? It was begun for a portrait of a girl living in the hills here, a sister of a young shepherd called Winlaw——'

'Of course, it is Maisie Winlaw. How very good!'

'You know her, Miss Langtoft?'

'Oh, yes, and her brother Hugh. We discovered them by chance once when we were exploring the hills. But I hear they have left the Southernknowe?'

'Yes, it is rather a sad affair for them, I fear. They were evidently attached to the place, but it seems Hugh couldn't make it answer.'

'You certainly ought to finish this picture, Mr. Crook,' interposed Mrs. Monk,



who held the chalk sketch of Maisie in her hand. 'It is a striking face.'

'So I thought, Mrs. Monk; quite a striking face. I ought to finish it.'

Mr. Crook thought it unnecessary to refer to another copy of this face which lay in a drawer, and which was practically finished, of which, in fact, this was but a rough study.

'I want to go up to see them at Braidstruther,' continued Clare, innocently, 'and I thought, Mr. Crook, that we might make a pleasant little fishing-expedition up the burn to do so. Say you and I and Mr. Whinstone and his sister. I could take my first lessons in the management of the black hackle——'

'My dear Miss Langtoft, the red! Do not you be a heretic upon this point. The black is of very little use.'

Clare laughed, and professed an entire freedom from prejudice upon the subject.

‘But, yes, it would be delightful,’ continued the vicar. ‘Have you counted the cost of a scramble up one of our burns?’

‘Oh, yes. I can climb about like a goat. I enjoy it immensely. Do name a day, and we must submit it to Mr. Whinstone.’

‘I suspect he has company to-day, for he broke an engagement with me this morning. Let me see—next Tuesday, I think, would do. Is that convenient to you?’

‘To me all days are alike. And whoever first sees our friends from the Hall will settle it with them?’

‘ Exactly.’

After this interruption, they reverted to the topic which had originally occupied them. The vicar entered with zest into the discussion of the haunts and habits of the various birds in which he was especially interested, and he found a sympathetic listener in Clare.

Nevertheless, Mr. Crook felt it an infinite relief to him when the portfolio was closed again and the ladies were rising to depart. The movement aroused him to his normal degree of vivacity, and he ushered his visitors into the garden with the utmost politeness, detaining them there to examine some of his flower-beds.

Here, too, were traces of a characteristic originality, certain parts being devoted

exclusively to wild flowers, one bed indeed being restricted to the family of thistles alone.

‘Yes, my thistles still flourish,’ he remarked, with noticeable complacency. ‘It contains a specimen of every British *carduus*; but it is too early yet to pass judgment upon it from an æsthetic point of view. If I have the pleasure of showing it you in early autumn, about September, you will, I think, acknowledge it a sight worth beholding. The *Marianus* there, with the glazy milk-streaked leaves, will be four to five feet high,—an exquisite thing. I got it from Bamburgh. That one? Singular; isn’t it? Like some fierce agricultural implement, or barbed chariot-wheel. That will be little less in size, but scarcely so comely. It is the woolly-headed thistle. I made a special

expedition to Bredon Hill in Worcester-shire for it.'

Thus he chattered on, as he invariably did when mounted upon one of his numerous hobbies. At the sound of horses trotting upon the road by his gateway, he turned to see who was passing, as did also the ladies.

'Ha, there he is, the rogue!'

Paul Whinstone it was and two other gentlemen with him, returning apparently from their afternoon ride. There was a mutual recognition and an interchange of dumb civilities, and the horsemen passed on.

'Will not appreciate a ballad, Miss Langtoft, although born one of them, as you may say.'

'He told me you considered him hopeless,' laughed Clare.

‘Did he really? Well he might. Then Tuesday, weather permitting. Good-bye, good-bye.’

Then the clergyman withdrew to the privacy of his study.

## CHAPTER IX.

## HERE'S TO THE LASS !

THE horsemen were but just disappearing at the corner where the fir-wood began. Before the last one was hidden by the trees, Clare saw him turn in his saddle to survey the road behind him, and then he too was gone.

Even if Paul Whinstone had been guilty of any such absurdity as introspection, he could not readily have discovered why that glimpse of the company in the vicarage

garden should have acted as a check upon his spirits. That it had done so was obvious not only to himself but to his companions also. Up to that point he had been especially hilarious : suddenly he had become silent and grave.

‘I say, Paul, what’s up?’ said one of them. ‘Secrets, Selby, as I live. The man is as good as doomed.’

‘So I perceive,’ remarked the other. ‘Anything romantic, old fellow, eh?’

‘What the deuce are you talking about?’ asked Paul, savagely. ‘I have got too old for charades. Talk plain English.’

‘Come, come, old man ! Don’t be bashful. I thought you were never so impregnable as you’ve made out. No need to blush, Paul. I know what it is : just safely pulled off my third. But don’t go too far, though, that’s my advice.’



‘What does the fellow mean, Selby?’

‘If it’s a suitable match, my dear Paul, I’ve not the slightest objection,’ replied Selby. ‘It’s as effectual as vaccination any day. But you are a day or two too late for romance. If there’s anything of that sort, you know, well—really—I must take counsel’s opinion upon it.’

‘You are the most confounded pair of fools,’ remarked Whinstone, irately. ‘Can’t I be civil to a lady without coming in for all this humbug? They were only my neighbours at the Peel. Which one do you place at my disposal, aunt or niece?’

‘Shouldn’t think of interfering so far, my dear boy.’

‘From the Peel,—oh, ha, an uncommonly fine widow: what’s her name? Mrs.——’

‘—Monk.’

‘That’s it, Mrs. Monk. I met them in town at the Rushmeres’.

‘Did you, though?’ asked Paul.

‘I did, sir. Looked at the niece for myself,—in confidence,—a deuced nice girl, but just a wee beet too learned for my taste. I’ll pass her, though, for you, Paul.’

‘Thank you. But look here, Alan, don’t be too free with any lady’s name here. You are not in town, remember, and this particular kind of fooling may be damned unpleasant in a wilderness of this sort. Honour bright, I know next to nothing about them. Unknown neighbours who have bought a bit of property; they are very seldom here. I don’t even know who Mrs. Monk is.’

‘Devonshire, I believe. A colonel, or

something of the sort. Gibraltar way, I understood. Died years ago.'

'Thank you, I am at least so much the wiser.'

Here Paul broke the conversation by an alteration in his pace, and took care that it was not resumed before their arrival at the Hall.

As a matter of fact, it was not resumed until the gentlemen were together over their wine, after Mrs. Whinstone and her daughter had left the dinner-table. They talked politics for a short time, the news having been received that day that Mr. Elliott Whinstone, Q.C., had been definitely selected as the candidate for the prospective vacancy in the Cheviot division of Northumberland. As these three young gentlemen would be an important element

in the practical promotion of the cause, they naturally found much interest in its discussion. It was Mr. Alan Kidland who changed the subject.

He took a decanter and poured himself out a glass of sherry, then raised it daintily by the stem until it was on a level with his eye. Then he looked towards Paul. This gentleman, who was in a better humour than before dinner, readily complied, and he and Selby filled. They all rose, and drank the unexpressed toast in silence.

As Paul quaffed the wine, Clare's face—beautiful certainly—appeared vividly before him; and at that moment, for the first time, he was conscious that the features had impressed themselves upon him in more than a mere neighbourly fashion. The eyes of both of his companions.

were fixed upon him, and he blushed as deeply at his thought as Clare herself might have done had she known it. His two friends burst into merry laughter, and threw themselves back into their chairs.

‘It won’t do, my dear Paul,’ said Kidland, ‘you are in for it, so prepare. Look up a bit of history and geography, and you’ll pull through. Capital practice to read your newspaper with an atlas. I did it for my second, honour bright, and was ploughed at last. I couldn’t keep her. Quotation-book and illuminated cards—which Flossie did for me—all no good. She saw through it, I believe, somehow. May you fare better, my boy.’

‘You two fellows have got an infernal plot on hand,’ said Paul, too radiant to

sustain any serious appearance of displeasure. 'I'll kick you out to-morrow, if you keep up this game, so I tell you.'

'But yours was a hard case, Alan—deuced hard, I called it,' remarked Selby. 'Burmah, wasn't it?'

'I thought it a hard case,' said the injured one; 'but I was not altogether without prejudice, you know. It was Burmah, Walter. Some row or other going on there at the time. First time I ever spoke without preparation. Hadn't looked the hole up. Took it for certain that such an infernal place was in Africa, wouldn't you? She went as pale as my shirt-front, Paul; upon my word she did. Was never even civil to me again. Bear it in mind, old man, and profit by the experience.'

'Thank you, Alan, I will,' said Paul,

rising, 'and, if you fellows have done, we'll go into the drawing-room.'

Good manners forbade any hesitation, and they both followed Paul from the table.

Walter Selby was a favourite of Mrs. Whinstone's, and he at once took a seat by the old lady's side. Paul and Kidland went over to Margaret, who was sitting on a couch with a large book in her lap.

'Family Bible, Miss Whinstone? Oh, beg pardon, I'm awfully short-sighted. I've studied a good deal, you know.'

It had not taken many hours for this young gentleman and Margaret to strike up an acquaintance of a mutually edifying description. At the first glimpse of him, the young lady had perceived Mr. Kidland to be her very beau-ideal of a gallant ;

such as she had contemplated for years with many tears of the most bitter anguish—nobody could say how many. She was almost beyond herself at the realization of her most frantic dreams; and had—yes, almost this very first day—already perceived that nothing less than Mrs. Kidland was her appointed destiny. Oh, to think of it! To lie on a couch in that wonderful Kidland Castle, of which Paul had given her such a picture in speaking of his friend, and there to bask literally from morning to night, year in, year out, in the warmth and radiance of such ravishing wit.

Now at once she threw upon him the whole lustre of her very dark eyes, sparkling with glee; orbs which, as she had not been slow to discern, did possess rare powers of fascination over this prospective squire. Margaret did not know how many



other orbs had previously exercised a very similar power over him ; it seemed only natural that fate should have kept him unimpressed all these years for her own particular conquest now. No other supposition could, for a moment, have occurred to her. Mr. Kidland did undoubtedly pay her quite marked attention ; but, then, he was of a romantic temperament, and the young lady's past history was sufficient to inspire him with exceptional interest. He had remarked confidentially to his friend, her brother, upon the deuced infallibility of birth, as exemplified in Margaret's astonishing power of adaptation to such a novel position. Her aptitude in this respect had certainly been remarkable.

‘I should never have thought it, Mr. Kidland,’ she had replied, making at once a place for him beside her.

‘Not ? Oh, come, come ! Why, I am considered the best scholar on the border ; you might say the only one. I have tried to keep Paul here to his books ; promised to read with him for one hour a day—six to seven a.m. ; but no use, no use. I hope you will help me. His ignorance is appalling. You will have found out that already, no doubt ?’

‘I have, indeed. But I like him all the better for it. I can’t bear learned people——’

Mr. Kidland drew himself up gravely, with his hand raised to his chin.

‘Oh, I beg your pardon. Except you, of course,’ laughed Margaret, gleefully. ‘But you keep your knowledge hidden so beautifully, you know. Doesn’t he, Paul ?’

‘Most beautifully,’ replied her brother. ‘Like a bird hides its teeth.’

‘Teeth!’ said Margaret, incredulously.  
‘Have birds teeth, Mr. Kidland?’

‘My dear Miss Whinstone! Can you possibly—you are joking now? Not seen a bird’s teeth! Really?’

‘Well, I don’t—— Let me see—no——’

‘There’s a treat in store for you, then. Wait until you come over to the Castle, that’s all. You can see, and feel them, too, there, if you like. Fact. I ought to know,’ he said, holding up the first finger of his right hand for the young lady to examine.

She leaned her head down towards it with tender interest.

‘That mark! Really? From a bird’s teeth?’

‘It is; honour bright!’

Margaret looked from one face to the

other. Paul leaned forward and whispered to her.

‘Oh, you horrid tease!’ cried she. ‘It is a parrot.’

Therewith Paul got up laughing, and walked over to his mother. After speaking to her, he left the room.

‘You must come and see our parrot, Miss Whinstone,’ the gentleman continued. ‘It is a prodigy—or a progeny of learning, as Mrs. Malaprop says. Can say the alphabet quicker than you or I—honour bright.’

‘Who is Mrs. Mal——’

‘Malaprop? Oh, a woman in a play. Don’t you know it? “The Rivals.” It’s running at the Vaudeville now. It’s an old play, I believe. I don’t generally care for these classics, as they call them; but, upon my word, this one is funny, really funny in parts. Best scene is where a

fellow is going to fight a duel—ha, ha!—and he turns funk—coward, you know. Ha, ha! It is really awfully funny, it is indeed !’

‘It must be,’ said Margaret. ‘But I should like to see your parrot awfully—’

From the hall young Whinstone stepped again to the dining-room, and there got a tumbler of seltzer-water. Then he went and changed his shoes, and got a hat and light overcoat. He left the house by a side-door, and set off briskly along the path to the village.

All was intensely still in the twilight. Paul could hear the rattle of a field-cricket somewhere far away, and a restless peese-weep raised its plaintive cry from the green haugh beside the river, but other sound there was none. Little grey moths

flitted about his path amongst the grass, and a bat or a may-bee would sweep past him as he walked, but he did not notice them. He glanced at the young moon, which was already sinking to the hill-tops, and at the thin thread of white mist which circled the foot of the black fir plantation, but they only impressed upon him the chilly state of the atmosphere, and led him to turn up the collar of his coat and button it close.

Through the village he went, then by the gateway of the Peel, at which he looked with furtive interest, but which he passed with accelerated pace. It did not give a turn to his thoughts, for in that neighbourhood had they been pitched ever since his escape from the drawing-room. The glimpse of the afternoon had unsettled him, why, he now fully recognised—had

recognised since drinking that unexpressed toast.

At the vicarage he turned in, and went up to the door and rang. To his surprise, and equally to his annoyance, Mr. Crook was from home. He had set off to Braidstruther at about five, and might be back at any moment. Would Mr. Whinstone come in and wait? He would, and entered.

Being upon an intimate footing with the vicar, Paul was taken into the gentleman's study, where a little bit of fire had been kept in. A lamp was alight in the room, displaying the cosy interior, and, without any restraint, the young man flung himself into the clergyman's easy-chair. When alone, he took up some drawings which were on the table to help him to pass the time, feeling no hesitation in doing so,

since Mr. Crook never displayed any in showing him the products of his pencil. He laid them on his knee and leisurely examined the first of them which was exposed. It did not greatly interest him, so he passed on to the next; thus it was with two or three which were lightly scanned, and then replaced upon the table.

Presently he came to a pause, and looked with increased interest at a sheet of paper which he held in his hand. Fully for a minute he regarded it, then held it out at arm's length to do so more dreamily, his eyes betraying a sense of spiritual gratification such as might be felt in the contemplation of a pleasant prospect.

'Capital!' he muttered at last; 'just as she looked at me when I came round. Beautiful . . .'

Whether Paul mentally transformed the



features before him to others which had so recently been haunting him; or whether the tender glow of which he had become conscious communicated its radiance to the whole sisterhood of woman, could not be easily determined. Certain it is, though, that, as he passed this audible verdict upon the picture, it was drawn more closely towards him, and, leaning his face forward to the paper, with his own lips he lightly touched those which were so vividly portrayed there.

Scarcely had he done so, when there was a sound of the pony's step outside to announce the arrival of the clergyman. Despite the presumable innocence of his intention, Paul started like a thief surprised, and hurriedly put the drawings together again in their place upon the table. When the vicar entered, his visitor

was twirling his thumbs with absolute composure.

‘Ha, my dear Paul, I am rejoiced to see you,’ cried Mr. Crook, with unfeigned heartiness. ‘But, man, I did not ask you to dinner,’ he added, with a humorous glance at Paul’s attire.

‘No, but it was such an exquisite evening that I slipped away to bring my apologies for disappointing you this morning. I am so sorry. Selby and Kidland came quite unexpectedly.’

‘Why, Paul, you know me well enough, surely. Not another word about it. It is a grand night. I have been to Braidstruther.’

‘You have! Are they getting settled?’

‘Tolerably, I think. But you never told me of your ducking. Ha, ha! how I should like to have seen it.’

‘ Oh, I thought nothing about it.’

‘ At any rate, it made your peace with Miss Maisie, I think. She went so far as to say that you had been very kind to them. Coming from her, I think this settles your theory of antipathy—eh?’

‘ Hardly. You are a clergyman and a known friend of mine.’

‘ Oh, well, no matter. Hugh came down with me. He is going to the Peel for some books or something that Mrs. Monk has got for him. She is really very good, —but that reminds me. You didn’t see them this afternoon?’

‘ Certainly I did,’ replied Paul, smiling to disguise the slightest increase of colour.

‘ They told you, then?’

‘ Oh, I’ve not seen them to speak to. I saw them here as I passed.’

‘Then I’ve got a commission from Miss Langtoft. She wants you to fish the Braidstruther burn with her next Tuesday.’

Paul flushed deeper, and betrayed some general confusion.

‘How do you mean?’

‘Oh, don’t be alarmed!’ exclaimed the vicar, laughing heartily. ‘I didn’t know you were bashful. The fact is, Miss Langtoft wants us to make up a kind of fishing picnic, do you see? You and your sister, me and she. Yes, on foot. She pooh-poohs the idea of the walk being too much for her. But how about Margaret?’

‘Have no fear for her; she can outwalk me. Yes, it would be very delightful. I should enjoy it immensely.’

‘Come, then, that will do.’

Paul immediately grew enthusiastic over

the project, and the two proceeded to discuss it in more detail.

In such conversation time drew on, but the visitor was loth to depart. The sole object of his visit had been to indulge some such thoughts as these, and the fates had indeed been kinder to him than he had had any reason to anticipate. All his soul was now warmed to a tender enthusiasm, and he thought with reluctance of the cold night outside, and with a positive shudder of the chilling atmosphere at the other end of his walk. But, however unpleasant, he knew it was inevitable, and that go at last he must.

As a preliminary movement, he rose lazily from his chair, and stood with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind his head. The vicar had for some minutes regarded him with interest, appar-

ently not without suspicion of his humour.

‘Yes, it will be very jolly,’ said Paul, apparently in soliloquy, with his eyes towards the ceiling, as though beholding there a clear picture of the scenes to be gone through. ‘We shall end up at Braidstruther, of course.’

‘Certainly.’

‘Yes ; but I must go. Confound those fellows ! By-the-by, Mr. Crook—er—Selby wants to read one of your beloved ballads, and for the life of me I can’t find the “Border Minstrelsy.” Will you let me take the first volume ?’

‘With all the pleasure in the world,’ exclaimed the vicar, turning towards the shelves. ‘There you are. But hadn’t you better take the three ? Oh, yes, just as well ; they are no weight—no inconvenience at all.’

With the acquisition of the volumes, Paul seemed more capable of resolution. A little nervous uncertainty which had hitherto played about him was finally removed, and he could face more calmly this compulsory departure.

The fir-wood was darker and more quiet than ever as Whinstone passed by it, and he had to own to a distinct sensation of relief when he was in the open road beyond. The moon had gone, but still a strong light overspread the sky from the north-west, as it does through the greater part of a summer night. Despite this, there was a singular obscurity amongst the objects on the earth. Outline, where such stood against the sky, was clearest cut ; but lower detail was annihilated.

When the wood was reached, Paul per-

ceived a strong spark of light peering at him from the gloom upon the left. Had he not been familiar with the locality, he could hardly have decided whether it came from a lantern close at hand or from a window a mile or two distant. As it was, he suspected that it issued from some point about the Peel, and consequently it became a light of exceptional interest to him. Not exactly in itself did it arouse his curiosity, but merely on account of its being the only distinguishable detail of that highly interesting locality. No mystery was suggested by a light issuing from a house which was inhabited.

When he reached the hedge by the gateway he distinctly saw that it came from the open doorway. For a moment he stood back in the dusk. The house was not far from the road, so that he could easily dis-



tinguish human figures in the rays, that is as human figures and not as individuals. A peal of laughter rang clear in the surrounding silence, and, although Paul had just taken a step in continuation of his journey, this brought him quickly to a pause, and made his frame tingle to the very tips of his hair. He shrank again into the obscurity by the hedge and looked through. He could hear some footsteps, but the figures were no longer visible.

‘Then we shall come on Tuesday, Hugh, unless you hear to the contrary. It will depend upon Mr. Whinstone.’

Paul started at the nearness of the sound, and would immediately have fled but that the divine accents had bewitched and paralysed him. For the second, he could not flee. Hugh had made some reply which was too insignificant to be

audible to the listener. A movement of the gate, however, by which he was standing quickly broke the spell, and he ran away under the hedge, back towards the fir-wood from which he had come. He ran for about a hundred yards before venturing to pause ; then he changed his pace to a walk, and came out into the middle of the road. Therewith he began to retrace his steps more leisurely.

The footsteps of another were now audible on the road before him, and Paul bit his lip with savage disappointment. Evidently he had outrun his design, and his little device had cruelly failed him. There were but a few yards left between them, each being able to discern an approaching figure, although not to recognise the individual, when both suddenly stopped.

‘Hugh, Hugh!’ rang clearly through the darkness.

It was like the cry of a particularly musical spirit, flitting perhaps in the obscure depths of the wood just behind them, and announcing to the silent world around the name too deeply graven on its heart. Never owl cried with such vital resonance, and no rational listener could have mistaken it for the dismal whoop of that ‘unfortunate and fatal bird.’ It was rather like a sudden ray of sunlight cleaving the sullen gloom of this sunless hour. Paul it pierced to a point of painful ecstasy. How it affected Hugh my cunning sayeth not.

The young shepherd had instantly turned, and was hastening again to the gate. He had not reached it when a light-clad figure met him.

‘This I forgot, for Maisie, with my affectionate regards,’ said Clare, as she placed a parcel in his hand. ‘Good-bye.’

‘Thank you, Miss Langtoft. Good-night.’

‘And, Hugh, I beg you will not allow your sister to be put about. You understand. You do not live in the midst of conveniences. We shall be delighted to accept your hospitality, I am sure you know, but shall not expect you to provide for an army. I wanted to say this to you. You understand?’ she said, with a kindly laugh. ‘We shall bring a horse laden with provender.’

Hugh laughed too.

‘You are always very kind, miss,’ he replied, with a ring of sincerity. ‘We shall not misunderstand.’

‘Good-night, Hugh,’ exclaimed another figure, passing by.

‘Who—I know that voice,’ said Clare.  
‘Why, the very man we wanted!’ she added, with laughter, as Paul stopped and came up to them.

‘Miss Langtoft!’ he said, in feigned astonishment.

‘The same. You didn’t expect to see me here, I know. Nor I you.’

‘I have just been to the vicarage.’

‘You know of our plans, then. Do they meet with your approval?’

‘Entirely.’

‘Then that is settled, Hugh. I really must not stand here any longer. Good-night.’

Hugh departed, and Paul walked on by the side of Clare.

The young lady was perfectly well aware of her companion’s thoughts about the unconventionality of her behaviour, and

was secretly very much amused at them. She knew that the orthodox patron at home would hardly have escorted the pastoral dependent so far as the front gate, as her aunt and herself had just done, nor yet would have cried after him so familiarly over some forgotten trumpery as she had taken upon herself to do. Necessarily, there were more recognised methods of doing these things. Neither Clare nor Mrs. Monk affected the slightest contempt for such methods, for there was very little that was democratic about them; but in their own behaviour it must be admitted they paid very little regard to polite observances, at least in their intercourse with inferiors. This was especially noticeable when they were at the Peel, and was no doubt the result of a not over-positive attitude in them to the life with which

they came in contact there. They went to it as imaginative strangers, and everything was consequently idealised to their view, with a consequent idealisation of their own behaviour.

Such unconstrained attitude was so natural to Clare that no thought about it would have occurred to her but for this encounter with a more orthodox neighbour. She had suddenly recognised how it must have appeared to him, hence the momentary consciousness.

‘I hope you appreciate your new shepherd, Mr. Whinstone,’ said Clare, directly they were alone.

‘I hope I do, Miss Langtoft. He is a good fellow.’

‘A particularly good fellow, my aunt thinks. More intelligent than most men in his position.’

‘I—I suppose so,’ replied Paul, with some hesitation. ‘He seems to read a good deal.’

‘Has he spoken much to you about his reading?’

‘Why, no. The truth is, I think he hardly considers me intelligent enough for such confidences. Ha, ha!’

‘You are too modest, Mr. Whinstone.’ They now stood by the gate. ‘Good-night. I do hope you don’t feel drawn into this Tuesday’s expedition perforce.’

‘Oh, Miss Langtoft. I assure you it will be the greatest delight to me.’

There was no insincerity in his tone.

‘I accept that, certainly. Good-night.’

They parted. Paul was aware of the momentary delight of touching her hand, but for the rest he felt in a state of positive depression. So fragmentary; so abom-



inably unsatisfactory; altogether as cold as the night. But what had he expected?

‘But Tuesday—Tuesday!’ he muttered, as he hurried forward on his way.

## CHAPTER X.

## LEAVEN.

To anybody less inured to the characteristics of a moorland country, the walk which lay before Hugh Winlaw after he had left the precincts of the mountain village—and therewith the limits even of the narrowest civilisation—might have offered something short of positive attractions. There would seem something unpleasantly impressive in the fact of man and his world being practically behind one, leagues of silent waste alone before,

with not so much as a rustling bough to break the stillness of the universe, or a ray from the moon to dispel the awful obscurity of the horizon.

But this traveller, not by nature unimaginative, at present received no kind of suggestion from his sombre surroundings. Neither sound nor light was he in need of, for he was not conscious of their absence. Indeed, within himself he harboured both, and the mere material intrusion of either might at this moment have been rather irksome than otherwise.

Hugh had, as we know, been to the Peel, and his visit to the place had made a considerable impression upon him; more considerable, indeed, than had been the accumulated result of all his previous intercourse with that household. He had long since been 'discovered' by Mrs.

Monk, and that original lady had found something in the young shepherd to excite her peculiar interest, and to call forth an undisguised display of her partiality and favour. The form which it had hitherto principally assumed was that of a kindly ministering to a certain intellectual tendency in Hugh, which his position might otherwise have rendered rather difficult of indulgence. She would bring down books for him whenever she came to High Feldon, and had more than once sent him some by post, when her absence from the Peel was unusually prolonged. Thus it came that even a letter or two had been exchanged between them; and this, however trivial the subject-matter of the communication, always adds a tinge to the complexion of an intercourse.

Notwithstanding all this, it was with a

feeling of considerable nervousness that Hugh presented himself at the Peel upon this particular occasion. This was scarcely lessened by the queenly appearance of the lady of the house, although she did her utmost, as she always did, to neutralise by her natural manner the artificial stateliness of her belongings. She took her visitor into a little nondescript room of hers, which may have been intended for an unconventional boudoir, but which had very much the appearance of a polite curiosity-shop. There were busts and statuettes scattered about in singular confusion ; an easel in one corner ; a guitar and a harp in another ; a human skull in a third. The walls were clothed with paintings of various descriptions, all of which upon examination would have been found to be the work of masters in their

art. It was with difficulty, certainly, that Hugh succeeded in checking all display of curiosity.

‘Yes, take that black chair, Hugh. Charles the Martyr is said to have sat in it before you. But you are loyal, I hope, and will fully appreciate the privilege.’

‘The most sacred things cannot escape base uses, ma’am, in these days,’ replied Hugh, with a significant smile, as he became seated.

‘As a general assertion, I will accept it, but not in this particular application. Like the—why, yes, why not?—like the devil,’ said the lady, emphatically, ‘avoid a too great modesty, Hugh. Remember the world inevitably accepts you at your own estimate—that is, if your estimate err on the side of moderation. Only vociferate loudly enough that you are a great man,

and in due time, I assure you, your claims will be unhesitatingly admitted.'

'But the hills are deaf to the loudest vociferation,' returned Hugh.

'Are they? Then shout over the hills. Put your hollowed hands to your mouth, and give a downright good Homeric shout.'

'I should like to.'

'You would?' said Mrs. Monk, looking at him inquiringly.

'Certainly I should, ma'am.'

The lady turned away to get a little pile of books which had been lying on a chair, then she placed them on the table.

'How old are you?' she asked, curtly, looking again at her visitor.

'Twenty-four, ma'am.'

'Twenty-four! Bless me, you are only a boy. You mean to say you were only

twenty when I first saw you. I thought you were at least five or six years older. Well, now, Hugh,' Mrs. Monk continued, more kindly, as she sat down, 'you have been unfortunate. Do you care to speak about this subject?'

'If you wish it, ma'am,' replied Winlaw, reddening slightly.

'I do wish it. Why did you never let me know about your difficulties?'

'I have not been in difficulties, ma'am. Certainly I should not have felt the right to speak to you about them if I had.'

'Well, then, please to feel the right at once, and don't lose the feeling again if—if you have the slightest regard for me. But not been in difficulties? How else would you describe your position?'

'You mean difficulties about money, ma'am?'



‘Certainly I do. The word has no other meaning in the world at present.’

‘I have had no difficulties of this sort.’

Mrs. Monk regarded him with increasing astonishment, wholly misunderstanding his attitude.

‘My dear Hugh,’ she began, in a softer tone, ‘you may trust me. I do not ask you this out of vulgar curiosity.’

‘My dear lady, I couldna think it,’ he exclaimed, impetuously, blushing deeply as he did so.

She raised her finger with a smile, as if to quell his rising spirit.

‘You have left your farm of Southern-knowe, to which you must be attached, and which has been held by your family for so many years, and yet you are not in difficulties?’

‘I am not,’ asserted Hugh, with more

resolute dignity than he had yet displayed. 'Difficulties means difficulties in paying one's debts, and I have not the slightest difficulty in paying every farthing that I owe, and still having money in the bank.'

'Then certainly I am under a great delusion,' replied Mrs. Monk, hardly disguising her astonishment. 'In delicacy I have no right to ask you more. Do forgive my ridiculous misapprehension.'

Hugh had been conscious of an increasing glow of chivalrous enthusiasm as he talked with this refined and beautiful lady, but he had hitherto effectually restrained himself from any betrayal of the sensation. There was now to be some evidence of it in tone and feature.

'But I hope that I may tell you more, Mrs. Monk,' he began, looking with un-

abashed earnestness into the face before him.

The lady merely nodded and smiled.

‘More than five years ago my father died ; my mother has been dead for years. At nineteen I was left with that large hill-farm on my hands, and not much money, and still less wit, to carry it on with. The end of it all cannot surprise you. Sheep-farming is like other business, and cannot be carried on by thinking of other things. I have never made it pay. If I must tell the truth, I have never tried to make it pay. Money won’t last for ever at this rate, so that I have to give the place up. That is the short history of it, ma’am.’

There was a touch of impetuosity in his utterance which Mrs. Monk noted.

‘Terse and to the point, Hugh,’ replied

she, with a smile. 'You didn't care whether you gave it up or not, then?'

'On one side I did, and on another I didn't. I should have liked weel enough to keep on with the place if I could have done so without making money from it.'

'I see,' said the lady, returning his expression of amusement. 'Then you think your new position, with an absence of the chief responsibility, will suit you better?'

'Perhaps it may do, ma'am.'

'You are evidently doubtful about it. You mean that you don't know of anything to suit you better?'

'I am afraid that's it.'

'Is there anything you would like better if you could get it?'

'I don't know that there is, ma'am. I am a fool at all kinds of business.'

‘Do you write poetry?’ asked the lady, with interest.

‘No, no, ma’am,’ replied Hugh, laughing. ‘Never a verse.’

‘You say business can’t be carried on by thinking of other things. What other things?’

‘Oh, hundreds of things that I cannot just think of, ma’am,’ said Hugh, with a smile. ‘Things that I read about in the papers, or in my books. Anything that’s going on in the world there at the back of old Simonside——’

‘Beyond the reach of your shout?’

‘Ay, ay,’ said Hugh, with a head-shake. ‘Far beyond it, ma’am, more’s the pity.’

‘But not beyond the reach of your step, Hugh. How many have trudged thither from these Border hills with infinitely less

to recommend them than you, and have taken possession of that world beyond there by sheer force of muscle.'

Hugh's colour deepened again.

'They have, ma'am,' he replied, warmly, 'but not with less to recommend them. They could do something, and knew that they could do something, and went to do it. If I went, I could do nothing, although I was longing to be active, and I should go mad because of it. I should go mad and kill myself, most likely.'

'I will not believe it,' cried Mrs. Monk, with a corresponding vehemence. 'If you fling a very puppy into the torrent he will strike out and swim. And you! Bah! nonsense! You are morbid from long solitude.'

'It is true what I say, ma'am,' replied Hugh, looking with unflinching resolution

into the lady's face. 'When I was last through to Newcastle, I felt it. My arm trembled to take part there, but I knew that I could no more do it than a baby.'

'I see it,' said his companion, with more complacency. 'You mean that you did not know what to do. You saw the exhilarating tableau, and you longed to take every part in it at once. You are too receptive, Hugh ; too comprehensive. You must discriminate. You must find out where to begin, that is all that's wanting.'

He regarded her without speaking.

'It is as I have long suspected,' Mrs. Monk went on. 'Your attitude is more intellectual than practical. But you must remember that it is only by accomplishment of some kind that we are measured. I may feel assured that I have all the soul

and intellect of Shakspeare, but if I can't give them expression I may as well, or much better, be a coal-heaver. You must compel yourself, Hugh, to some kind of definite accomplishment, and not waste another day in idle contemplation. Have you any new theory to propound anent the breed of sheep ?'

She was so serious that Hugh looked at her, quite puzzled.

'No, ma'am, I haven't,' he replied, gravely.

'I thought not. Then can you draw a sheep on paper ?'

'I don't think I can—not to know it for a sheep when it was drawn.'

'That also is quite possible. If you could, you would most probably know it by this time. Then can you write out the history of a sheep from its cradle in



the fold to—to—bah! to the shambles, I suppose?’

‘I think I can,’ replied Hugh, with increasing confidence.

‘That, too, I think most probable. Try it, at any rate, without delay, and, if you are agreeable, let me see the result. Will you?’

‘Certainly, ma’am.’

‘Well, that is something. Do it seriously, Hugh. I am not joking, I assure you. It is trivial, but never mind. We will have a more abstruse topic next time. Now, here are the few books I have brought you. Carlyle’s “Past and Present;” two or three more of Richard Jefferies’, as you liked the other one so much; “Jane Eyre,” that’s a novel, I don’t think you have read it?—and the “Golden Treasury,” a collection of all our best

lyrics. Don't thank me, please. Oh, yes, and Miss Langtoft added this one, Morley's "English Literature," a useful reference-book. These will give you food for the contemplative side for a short time. But now I have another point, Hugh. Of course you are a politician; of tory propensities, they tell me. Well, that is all the better. I don't know whether Mr. Paul has told you that, in all probability, his father is going to stand as a candidate here shortly. Now, this will give you a good opportunity. Plunge into it. Really study the main questions that are before the people, and form your own intelligent opinion about them; for the sake of present convenience, though, strictly through the conservative spectacles. You must take part in all the electioneering activity;

it will do you a vast deal of good. I believe you can do it well. You do yourself, don't you ?'

'I shall not be sorry to try, ma'am.'

'Of course not. That is the right attitude. The mere practical shake-up will be invaluable to you, to say nothing of the extension of your experience of life. You are man of the world enough to know that, at these election times, there is a marvellous slackening of the social bond. You can command intercourse of quite a reasonable kind with persons whom it would be difficult to encounter so intimately at any other time. Make the most of this. Keep your eyes open and your wits alive. You understand me ?'

'I do, ma'am.'

Mrs. Monk seemed to throw off much

of her ordinary cold and cynical exterior during this exhortation, and to enter with some subjective zeal into the matter she was discussing.

‘Paul Whinstone is your good friend. I shall speak to him. Now above all, my dear Hugh, do throw off all unnecessary modesty. I can trust your instinct. It cannot lead you beyond the bounds of gentility. Simply be natural; just what you feel impelled to be in all respects and in all situations. I do not know why I should not whisper to you that, in pure, natural ability you will be inferior to but two or three, equal to several, and superior to the vast majority of the gentlefolk with whom you may be brought into contact over this affair. You will not mistake me. I am not a radical or a communist, as you

well know,' said the lady, looking about her. 'I could not live in a world from which the grades of society were absent; to nobody are the refinements of an advanced civilization more necessary than to me; therefore you may depend upon what I tell you in this respect. In these refinements you could hardly ever overtake us, if you should ever have the means to attempt such a thing; but your innate gentility is all-sufficient, and, if you look to it, will never betray you in whatever position you may find yourself. Nevertheless, for worldly experience and polish, keep your eyes open.'

Hugh's features had, early in the harangue, become fixed, betraying intense interest, with perhaps a suspicion of surprise; and his eyes were never moved

from the face of the lady. As she ceased his eyes fell, but no word escaped him. Mrs. Monk rose from her chair.

‘There now, Hugh,’ she said, with a light, pleasant laugh, ‘I have lectured you quite enough for one night. Let us go into the dining-room for a few minutes.’

The lady led the way, and Hugh followed her in silence.

The young man had but small appetite for a repast, but out of politeness he had to partake of something. Just as he was finishing, a light step was heard in the hall, and the door of the dining-room was opened.

‘Oh, it is a glorious night,’ said Clare, gaily. ‘I quite envy you your walk, Hugh.’

‘You had better go with him,’ remarked Mrs. Monk. ‘Maisie will no doubt accommodate you.’

‘I should like to, but I won’t trouble her without notice. She will have quite enough of us on Tuesday.’

Clare proceeded to lay her scheme before Winlaw, when she found that the vicar had forestalled her, and, moreover, that Hugh was visibly gratified by the suggestion. The shepherd regarded the young lady with the same complacent reverence that he displayed towards her elder, but with perhaps a more pronounced tinge of bashfulness. There was an attractive manliness, nevertheless, in his bearing which overrode all suspicion of *gaucherie*. To a delicate perception his refined diffidence might have enhanced the manliness

of his aspect, as it obviously arose from a chivalrous recognition of the abstract divinity of high womanhood, rather than from any mere common timidity before one socially his superior. Clare's gracious glance seemed to discern the quality of the homage and to accept it.

'And you are getting settled in your new home?' she said, when the other matter had been disposed of.

'Quite, thank you, Miss Langtoft.'

'Oh, it must be grand out there!' continued the young lady. 'You face only the essential facts of life, as Thoreau calls them. Terribly impressive. I have set my mind upon seeing the sun rise from the threshold of such a house some day. What do you say, aunt? Would you come there for a night if Miss Winlaw would have us?'



‘Certainly I would, child.’

‘Oh, capital! Then it is settled. I wish we could have Wordsworth with us to celebrate it in a sonnet.’

## CHAPTER XI.

## VISIONARY.

EVERY detail of this interview was presented afresh to Hugh's vision as he trudged homewards through the darkness. It affected him more now at first as a general tonic, rather as a glowing picture of remarkably exhilarating influence, than as one of any definite practical suggestion. It stood in a strong light which dazzled him by its brilliance, causing the whole world to be transfigured to his gaze. No longer was such world a congeries of more

or less sordid elements, struggle and strife and wretchedness ; it was a world of light, —an illimitable field for deeds, vague enough certainly, but of a high and glorious tendency.

Never before had this chord been so definitely struck within him. The note was now vibrating through the whole of his being, throwing him into a state of ecstasy in which he was assailed by a sense of unlimited and irresistible strength which he longed to put in action. The world seemed small to him,—the whole compass of it, indeed, beneath the sole of but one of his feet ; his step upon it of remarkable elasticity and vigour. As he advanced in such transcendent mood, the light in his sister's window appeared to him, and this brought his vision to a more definite focus.

When he reached the house, Maisie was seated sewing by the fire; his own homely supper being spread out for him on the table. The intercourse between these two had never been of a sentimental kind; since Hugh's resolution to abandon the Southernknove, it had been positively cool. Nevertheless, at bottom there was a solid stratum of affection, and both were very well aware of the fact. As Hugh entered, his sister looked up at him, and seemed to discern something unusual in his countenance. She continued to look at him for a few seconds before she spoke; but then she made no reference to the subject of her thoughts.

‘Are there any amongst them that I can read, Hugh?’

He was eagerly untying the bundle of books at the table.

‘Ay, my lass, you shall see them in a minute.’

The volumes were arranged side by side with the backs upwards, and the young man raised himself to his full height to regard them; then he took them up between his two hands and laid them in his sister’s lap. She leaned forward to read the titles, and her brother paced to and fro in the room. His dog, which had at once taken its natural place by the fender, did not understand the movements, and looked inquiringly from time to time at the face of his master before definitely settling down to a snooze.

Hugh paced the floor in silence, and Maisie examined the books. To one not accustomed to the situation, the place would have appeared appallingly still. Except for the young man’s footsteps, the

rustling of a page occasionally in the girl's fingers, the ticking of the clock, and the modest ring of a live coal falling against the fender from time to time, there was no sound at all for several miles around. But yes, if the window had been opened and the head thrust into the darkness without, one other sound would have been audible, the only truly natural one of the number, that incessant lullaby of the never-resting water.

From the far end of the room Hugh, in contemplation, gazed at his sister as she handled the volumes, and she, aware of the cessation of his step, turned her eyes in his direction. In a second or two she removed them again.

‘Maisie,’ said the young man from where he was standing, ‘just tell me exactly what you think of me?’

The girl blushed deeply, and played with the cover of one of the books. The remark may possibly have touched too nearly some thoughts at that moment engaging her ; but that was not all. Never in his life before had Hugh addressed to her words of personal import, whether with regard to himself or her. For this turn, therefore, she had been wholly unprepared.

Seeing the effect of his words, he came and sat upon the table not far from her. At the other end of it lay the supper prepared for him, his disregard of which was another symptom of his peculiar condition. The dog, as if fully conscious of the strange nature of the situation, rose slowly from his place and laid his nose against the knee of his master with the plainest possible entreaty not to be left out of the approaching confidences if such were to be

the nature of the proceedings. In return, Hugh played with his long, silken ear with so remarkable a condescension that Luath was encouraged to squat himself down on his haunches and raise one paw after the other most solemnly to his patron's thigh. The man's fixity of gaze, though, was more than the bashful animal had asked, and he wrinkled his forehead and turned his eyes to and fro, and winked most pathetically to escape the searching scrutiny to which he was subjected.

A minute must have passed, and still Maisie had volunteered no reply.

'You are quite right in what you think, my lass, so dinna fear to tell it.'

'I think nothing bad, Hugh,' said the girl, with her eyes still lowered.

Her attitude was the more striking because there was nothing of the nervous



maiden about her in every-day discourse.

‘ Maisie !’

The eyes of dog and master were fixed upon her, and she blushed again. Hugh laughed.

‘ I think you have not done what you might have done——’

‘ And, what if I had been kind to you, I should have done; that’s it, isn’t it, lassie ?’

‘ No, indeed, it isn’t !’ asserted she. ‘ You have never been unkind to me, and you know it. You have been unkindest to yourself. Do you think this is your place in the world, to be tending another man’s sheep. Do you, Hughie ?’

She looked up at him now with her face just a little flushed; his was the lowered glance.

‘ No, Maisie, I dinna think it; and, to

go a wee farther, I dinna think it's my place to be tending sheep at all. To some men it has been a helpful calling, but not to me. My mind is no vigorous enough to live upon itself, nor quite weak enough to live upon the herding, so I ha' fallen between the two stools into the slough of idleness beneath 'em. But, look you, Maisie, I'm kicking in my sleep, and dare-say I'll waken up presently. That place has gone like a millstone frae my neck, and very much of the worst of me has gone with it. It has, Luath, my lad,' he exclaimed, energetically, with a pinch of the ear which made the dog wince. 'Will ye hae a wee bit patience wi' me, doggie, and see what'll come at the hinder end? Will ye, noo?'

The vernacular and the energetic tone

aroused the dog, and he perked up his head, with ears slightly raised, on the alert for a more intelligible direction.

‘Then haud awa, man, and kiss your mistress.’

The instruction was new to him; he looked up wistfully, head bent more resolutely aside, quivering to understand the words of his master.

‘Off, noo! Kiss your Maisie, I tell ye!’

With a little impetuous whine, the dog flung his paws into the young woman’s lap, on the top of the books which were lying there, and thrust his nose into her face. Maisie caught his head in the hollow of her two hands, laughing, and imprinted a loud kiss upon the smooth open brow.

‘Ay, ay, doggie, we’ll hae no doubt of the future, will we?’

Therewith Hugh sat down to devour his supper.

After he had finished, it was already exceptionally late for them to be up. During his meal they had talked of the proposed visit of their aristocratic neighbours, and of the necessary household details connected with it, and now Maisie was ready to retire. Perhaps she wished to escape all risk of further confidences; the experience was a novel one, and was probably deemed sufficient as a preliminary instalment. Maisie, like all rational women, was constitutionally conservative to excess, and her brother's hints would doubtless require leisurely examination. Anything more definite might have too uncomfortably overwhelmed her.

With her candle alight, she came towards him where he was sitting. Of late

years it had not been a regular custom, but her action caused no surprise to Hugh to-night.

‘Good-night, Hughie,’ she said, leaning forward to kiss him.

‘Good-night, Maisie,’ he replied, pressing his hand perceptibly upon her shoulder. ‘I shall sit up rather late, so you will know what it is if you hear me.’

For some time after Hugh had been left alone he sat, without material occupation, gazing into the fire. He felt more comfortable for the few words he had exchanged with his sister; for, despite a leaven of youthful resentment and pride, he had for long enough been tantalised by a half-conscious suspicion that what he instinctively knew to be her feeling about him was based upon sound reason alone.

The deliverance from such ignoble submission to petty insincerity was gratifying to his generous spirit, and Hugh now enjoyed the exhilaration of soul consequent upon such plenary confession. In his exaltation he was enabled to regard more honestly the whole of his past behaviour. Foolish it had been, undoubtedly; as we adjudge most dissipation when it has served its turn,—but there was a remarkable freedom from the taint of depravity in his antics. At the bottom of all his imaginative riotousness there had ever been a strain of puritan sensibility, sufficient to render the baser forms of sensuality at all times an impossibility to him.

After thus idly watching the flitting scenes which followed one another so rapidly through the embers, Hugh rose from his chair, and, gathering the new

books together, went with them into another room. In a moment he came back for the lamp.

This fresh apartment was a well-furnished parlour, and, judging by the books which were in it, served the purpose also of a study upon such occasions as its occupier felt disposed so to regard it. But there was nothing settled about him to-night. He began by glancing through all the books recently acquired as he stood beside the table; an occupation which he soon found inspire him with more definite sensations than at any time before. The volumes became spiritualised. Each one seemed to strike a new string of some deep-sounding lyre, giving in turn some key-note to the infinite music of man's universe. For long spaces he would stand, with one foot raised to the seat of a chair,

and his eyes bent over a page which obviously he was not reading. Then he would arouse himself, fling the book on to the table, and take up another. Last of all he seized the fat book, with black cover and red edges, which Miss Langtoft had added to the number. It was Morley's 'Sketch of English Literature.'

Hugh gazed for some time at the fly-leaf, upon which his name had been written by the giver; then he turned onwards page by page, the sound of his finger in the paper being the only one in the whole house audible at the moment. Presently the man's hand was stayed, and he was intently reading. He had alighted upon the picturesque death-bed scene of the Venerable Bede—a name he had heard casually when on an expedition to Tyneside, but now to be suddenly invested with a mar-



vellous personality. The stupendous spectacle to-day of the northern home of the Cyclops was recalled by the suggestion, but, as he read, was as rapidly dispelled. The contrast smote him with an appalling significance. A.D. 735 . . . . A.D. 1884. What lay between? History assumed a new aspect in his eyes.

He went to a cupboard in which were several books, and brought a volume forth. It was Green's 'Short History,' a volume which, now as he opened it, caused him to mutter with vexation. He turned up the incident which was interesting him, and re-read it as presented to him there. He saw clearly the whole of that picture in the silent monastery of Jarrow: the invincible old scholar holding death at arm's length that he might put the finishing words to his task; the weeping group of

students around him. 'There is still a chapter wanting, and it is hard for thee to question thyself any longer.' 'It is easily done, take thy pen and write quickly.' And thus it wore on to evening. 'There is yet one sentence unwritten, dear master.' 'Write it quickly,' bade the dying man. 'It is finished now.' 'You speak truth,' said the master; 'all is finished now.' And so, to the swell of the solemn chaunt, the old hero passed quietly away.

The shepherd's eyes had become misty as he closed the volume, and he began again to pace the room. Visions of what life had been to men such as this one crowded quite oppressively upon him. Instead of mere dried specimens labelled and disposed of, a vast host of living men rose from between the sides of those books

lying near him, with every hand of them upon some form of labour. Their importunity distressed him, and he was urged from the narrow limits of his chamber to the freer expanse of starlight without.

The cool, night air fanned him as he paced to and fro before the doorway, but it failed to restore him to composure. Through the terrible silence of the moorlands, and above the ceaseless ripple of the burn, came the distant rumble of an active world—a world in which he, this listener, was nothing, in which he had voluntarily consented to be nothing. Apparently from the mere nervous necessity of action, he groped on the ground for a stone, and, when he found it, he flung it with all his strength far into the dark expanse of heather. He distinctly heard it alight with a thud at a distance, and, at

the next instant, a hoarse, unearthly grumble broke the stillness of the universe. He threw another stone, which dropped as before, and then there was the noise of hurried flight, simultaneously with a more definite guffaw.

‘Come-out, come-out, c’m-out, c’m-out, m’-out, m’-out——’

Hugh laughed as it died away, and continued his pacing; and he was pacing still when the grey dawn crept upwards from the sea, and displayed a desolate and silent world around.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.







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